

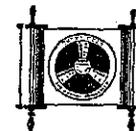
WHAT WE MEAN BY RELIGION

*A Modern Interpretation of the
Sabbath and Festivals*

BY
IRA EISENSTEIN

Based on
"The Meaning of God in Modern Jewish Religion"
by MORDECAI M. KAPLAN

REVISED AND ENLARGED



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Dedicated to the loving memory of

LENA KAPLAN

A true "woman of valor"

NOTE ON

THIRD EDITION

TWENTY YEARS

have passed since the publication of the first edition of this book. In these twenty years, the Reconstructionist movement has gained many new adherents, and the Foundation has expanded its activities. The establishment of the Reconstructionist Press was one of the most important steps taken to acquaint American Jews with the ideas of the movement.

I am grateful to the Press for issuing this third edition, after a period of several years during which the book was out of print. I hope that rabbis and teachers will resume using it in their classes.

Additional changes in the text have, I hope, brought it up to date.

My sincere thanks go to Mrs. Molly Baum for her typing of the manuscript, and for her conscientious and careful proof-reading.

May, 1958

I. E.

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INTRODUCTION

THERE ARE MANY Jewish men and women today who say: "I am a good Jew. I am interested in Jewish causes. I help Jews who are in trouble, and I always defend the good name of the Jew. I find a great deal of joy in studying Jewish literature and Jewish history. But I am not religious. Religion does not interest me." This is very remarkable. It is remarkable because, in all the centuries of Jewish history, Jews have always been interested, first and foremost, in religion. In fact, if we were to ask, "What is the outstanding contribution which the Jewish people made to the world?" the answer would have to be: "Religion."

Why is it that so many Jews feel as they do about religion? Why do so many say, "Religion does not interest me"? First, many Jews were brought up in homes where all the laws and regulations concerning the Sabbath and the Festivals were very strictly observed. As children, they were constantly being told: "You may not do this. You are not allowed to do that. This is forbidden on the Sabbath. This is not permitted on a holiday." Naturally, they thought that the Jewish religion was only one long list of restrictions and duties which their parents had made them observe. They did not know enough about the beautiful mean-

ings which the Sabbath and the Festivals might have for them.

The second reason is: Jewish children had to learn to recite prayers which they could not understand. When those who are now grown men and women were children, it was considered necessary for them to learn how to read the prayers *quickly* and correctly; often speed was considered even more important than correctness. If the children tried to ask questions about the prayers, they were discouraged. They were told that it was not up to them to ask questions about the prayers but merely to obey their parents when their parents told them to recite the prayers. After a while, when these children grew up, they became disgusted with religion, because they thought that religion had to do only with saying prayers as quickly as possible—prayers which they could not understand.

A third reason is this: Even when the meanings of the Sabbath and the Festivals were explained to them, they found it very hard to see the connection between those meanings and their own lives. For example, a child would be told that: "We observe the Sabbath because, on that day, God rested, after creating the world in six days." The child might ask why it was necessary to rest just because *God* rested; he might ask whether it was really true that the world was created in six days; in most cases, the answers he would get to these questions would not satisfy him. As a result, he would see no reason at all for observing the Sabbath. Or, in the case of Sukkot, he might be told that we build

a *sukkah* because, thousands of years ago, our ancestors lived in *sukkot* while wandering in the desert. The child might ask: "Suppose they did? Why should *we* live in *sukkot*? Why is it necessary for us to remember what our ancestors did so long ago?" In most instances, the child would not get a satisfactory answer.

There is a fourth reason: Many children were taught to believe in miracles. They were told that the Red Sea opened so that the Israelites could pass through; that Joshua, the great leader of the Hebrews, made the sun stand still; that Elijah brought a dead child back to life—and other stories of the same kind. When the children grew up and studied science and history, they began to question whether these miracles ever actually took place. Their parents and teachers would very often refuse to answer their questions, or would give them answers which did not satisfy them. As a result, they lost their interest in Jewish religion.

Thus, many, many Jews were brought up without religion, and as we look about us today, we discover that they missed a very valuable part of their education. At all times, Jews have found that religion was a great source of strength to them. It helped them to have courage and hope, even though they lived through the most terrible hardships. Jews are still suffering hardships. In many lands they are being persecuted. But they are not the only ones who are suffering. All the nations and the peoples of the world are today facing serious problems. The problems get more and more difficult to solve, and sometimes the men and women throughout the

world wonder whether they are ever going to solve them—whether the problems *can* be solved. For this reason, religion, with its message of hope and courage, is more necessary today than ever before.

And that is why this book has been written. Its purpose is to explain the inner meanings of the Sabbath and the Festivals to the younger generation of Jews. There is, of course, much more to the Jewish religion than the Sabbath and the Festivals. There are many daily observances in the home and synagogue which are not included here. The writer believes, however, that if Jews were at least to understand the deeper meanings of the Sabbath and the Festivals, they would be helped tremendously to face the problems of the world with courage and hope, and with intelligence. They would not brush aside Jewish religion with impatience, nor would they say that religion is "old-fashioned," or "out of date."

Let us proceed then to study what the Sabbath and the Festivals meant to our ancestors, and what they can mean to us. The writer is confident that those who give serious thought to what follows will want Jewish religion to play a very important part in their lives.

SOME THOUGHTS ON THE INTRODUCTION

1. Many Jews say that they are not religious. They are good Jews anyway, they say, and participate in Jewish life to some extent. What are some of their

- activities as Jews, which make them believe they are "good Jews"?
2. Name at least three reasons, given by non-religious Jews, for their indifference to Jewish religion.
 3. When people are truly religious, they usually feel that they are so, not to please someone, but because they derive some benefit from being religious. Can you describe what some of those benefits are?
 4. Ask your father and mother, or any other adults, how religion was presented to them. Were they told that it consists mostly of "don'ts"? Did they have to learn to read prayers without understanding them?
 5. Take a census of your friends, and try to discover how many of them are interested in Jewish causes, how many go to the synagogue on Sabbaths, holidays; how many have a "Jewish home."
 6. Sometimes Jews are under the impression that only *Jewish* religion is being challenged today. Do the Christians have the same problem? Inquire of the Catholics and Protestants whom you know. Teachers at school might help; a neighboring clergyman would perhaps be willing to give the information you are seeking.
 7. How would you summarize the purpose of this book?

CHAPTER I

THE SABBATH:

SYMBOL OF THE PERFECT LIFE

IN THE OBSERVANT JEWISH HOME, the Sabbath day is quite different from any other day of the week. The father does not attend business; the children do not go to school, and the mother serves special dishes for the table. On Friday evening, the whole atmosphere seems to change. The week-day spirit disappears, and a Sabbath spirit prevails. The mother lights the candles, and the father chants the special blessings over the supper table. After the meal, Sabbath songs are sung. In the morning, the family attends the synagogue service.

For centuries, the Sabbath has been the favorite day of the week for Jews. It was the one day when they could forget the many troubles which faced them all week long. It was the only day which they could spend in study and prayer, turning their thoughts away from the difficulties of living among unfriendly people, and of making a livelihood. That is why the Sabbath was such an important day in their lives. But the importance of the Sabbath does not date merely from one or two hundred years ago. From the very beginning of Jewish history, the Sabbath was regarded as a holy day. For example, the Sabbath is the only holiday mentioned

in the Ten Commandments. Next to the Day of Atonement, it was regarded as the holiest day of the year. In fact, according to some teachers, the observance of the Sabbath was equal in importance to the observance of all the laws in the Torah.

What was there about the Sabbath which made the Rabbis of old consider it so vital? According to them, the Sabbath was the symbol of the perfect life. What is a symbol? A symbol is a convenient word, or object, which helps us to keep an idea in mind. For example, the American flag is a symbol; it is a symbol of all that is good in American life—of freedom, democracy and opportunity. It is almost impossible for us to say "America," and think at once of all the thousands of different people, institutions, cities, farms, that America contains. The flag is a convenient object which helps us to keep all this in mind at once. In the same way, the Boy Scout emblem is a symbol. Of what?—of the Scout oath, of the Scout organization, its ideals and its heroes. The emblem is a symbol of the whole Scout movement. In the same way, the Sabbath is the symbol of the perfect life. Our ancestors believed that the world would some day become perfect, and then there would be no war, no injustice, no inequality. There would be "Sabbath all the time." Now, if the perfect world meant Sabbath all the time, then Sabbath to them must have meant perfection, perfect happiness for each and every person, perfect happiness for the nations of the world.

Our ancestors set aside one day each week—the Sab-

bath—when they tasted what it would be like to live in a perfect world. They prepared a program for the Sabbath which would be somewhat like the kind of life they hoped the "World to come" would offer them. The observance of the Sabbath, furthermore, was a constant reminder that the perfect world was *bound* to come sooner or later. It was necessary to be reminded of this fact very often, because, in a world of trouble and hardship, people could quite easily become discouraged and give up hope of ever seeing the day when perfect happiness would be achieved. The Sabbath, therefore, was a constant reminder that the ideal of a perfect life was an ideal that *could be achieved*.

If the Sabbath is to have this value for us today, however, we must have a very clear idea in our minds of what we mean by the perfect world, and how this idea is related to our belief in God. Unless we know definitely what the idea is, we cannot work toward it, and unless we know how that ideal is related to our belief in God, we cannot tell how belief in God will help us to work toward it.

1. *How Did Our Ancestors Picture the Perfect World?*

Our ancestors pictured the perfect world in some distant time. They did not believe that it could be achieved in their own lifetime, or even in a somewhat longer period of time. The perfect life, they believed, would be enjoyed when God would do away with the

present world and make a new world. Into this new world, He would bring all the people who during their normal lifetime lived according to the Torah. They would be brought back to life, but this time, to a life that would never end, to a life filled only with happiness. The rules and regulations of the Torah were for our ancestors the examinations which they had to pass in order to be eligible for citizenship in that World to come. They obeyed the Torah with all their hearts and souls during their short *natural* lives because they believed that by doing so they would be assured of coming to life again and enjoying the perfect world of the future.

What sort of world would that be? Our ancestors had a very clear picture in their minds of that world: The Jewish people would live in peace in its own land, Eretz Yisrael. The nations of the world would not wage war against one another. Every man and woman would have enough to eat and to drink, would live in a comfortable home, and no one would have to work very hard for a livelihood. People would be healthy; they would not suffer from sickness. They would not worry about becoming old and feeble. People would no longer quarrel with one another. They would be friendly and helpful. In other words, the world would be completely changed.

How did our ancestors happen to develop such a set of ideas about the World to come? They believed that God had a plan and that plan was to make a perfect world, in which man would lead a perfect life. That is why God placed Adam and Eve in the perfect Garden

of Eden, where they did not have to labor for their livelihood. God intended that they should live forever; but they disobeyed God by eating from a forbidden tree, and by doing so they brought evils into the world — pain, strife, and even death. Now that the perfect world had been spoiled, people could no longer live forever. From that time on, people became more and more wicked, and finally God had to bring a flood to destroy them. God saved Noah and his family because they seemed to be better than any of their fellow men; but nevertheless God realized that people would always be less than perfect after that. They could be kept from becoming altogether bad if they had a Law to follow. That is why God chose Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to develop a people who would obey that Law. But *perfection*, like that which existed in the Garden of Eden, would never again come about in the present world, and God's plan would not be realized. Therefore, the World to come had to be created; only in that way could God's plan be carried out.

In the meantime, as people died, the righteous would be sent to Paradise, and the wicked to Gehinnom, a place of punishment. Where they would be sent depended upon how they had acted on earth. When God decided to bring about the new world, He would send His messenger, the Messiah, to announce the new creation to all; the inhabitants of Paradise and Gehinnom would be brought back to life and would undergo a trial before God. Those who were declared righteous

would be admitted to the world to come, and the others would be destroyed.

In the new world, no one would have to labor; no one would ever die. People would be completely perfect; they would not have any desire to do evil. This new world would last forever.

This is how our ancestors pictured the perfect world. Does it seem strange to us? Yes. And yet we can understand how they came to have such ideas. In ancient times, people could not imagine changing the world *themselves*. In fact, anyone who had such an idea was considered irreligious, because he was "trying to act like God." Only God had the power to change the world. People knew very little about nature, or about what we call science, and they therefore assumed that the evils in the world were beyond the control of men. Evils, they believed, could be done away with only by God in a manner mysterious and unknown to men.

They could have believed, indeed, that the evils of the world were permanent; that they would never disappear. But, as we see, our ancestors refused to believe that the evils of life could never be destroyed; so they accepted this picture of the World to come as the only possible one. Thus we see that their belief in God gave our ancestors the *faith that evil must in the end give way to good*. Just *how* the good would win out they pictured in their own way, based upon what they knew about life and the world.

We today must have a different picture of the perfect world. Our knowledge of science and nature is

much greater than was theirs. But we must share with them the belief in God, *the very same faith that evil must in the end give way to good*.

2. How Should We Picture the Perfect World?

Today we no longer need picture the perfect world as existing in some far-off distant future, or as coming into being only after the destruction of this world. We need no longer feel so helpless in the face of evils. Science and history have taught us so much that we should feel confident about *remaking this world*. Science has even discovered many facts about human nature, and we have reason to hope that some day we shall know enough about ourselves to be able to remake ourselves and change ourselves into the kind of people we should like to be.

The question we must ask now is: what kind of people should we live to become, and what kind of society should we try to establish? In other words, what, exactly, should be our idea of the perfect life today? Should we have the same idea of the perfect life that our ancestors had, one in which we will not have to labor, in which people will never die, in which the lion and the lamb will be friends? Although some of the details must, of course, be different, in general our idea of the perfect life should be very much the same as our ancestors'. We might divide this idea into two parts: what each individual should be like, and what society should be like.

As individuals, we should want to be at peace with ourselves. This means, we should not always be troubled by desires that conflict with one another. For example, many people would like to be rich, and, at the same time, they would like to be honest. Today, it is very difficult to be both. Business men often are forced to tell untruths about the products they make in order to sell them. Lawyers often must ask their clients to swear falsely in court in order to win their cases. In politics, men must often give bribes and accept bribes in order to carry out orders from their leaders. Newspaper editors must often print falsehoods in order to please the owners of the paper. If one wants to be thoroughly honest, one finds that one has a very hard time getting rich. On the other hand, if one wants to be rich, one finds it very difficult to be honest. These two desires, therefore, are in conflict. Any person who suffers from this conflict cannot be happy.

How can we ever hope to be at peace with ourselves? It should be clear that this problem cannot be solved by any one person by himself. Being honest involves other people, and making a living involves other people. For example, cheating is dishonest. Now, the one who cheats must have *somebody* to cheat. In a classroom, if one boy copies, he copies from another. Thus, another boy is involved. Another example: a man has a wife and children to support; he does not earn enough to support them. Needing some extra money, he steals from his employer. If the employer would give this man a higher wage, the man would not have to steal; but the

employer, on the other hand, when asked by the man for a raise, complains that he cannot afford to pay a higher wage. He says, "Conditions are bad. I am not able to sell my products." If we try to understand why conditions are bad, we discover that "conditions" are caused by a war in Europe, or by a flood in the West, or a spell of dry weather in the farmers' territory. That is why, if one wants to do away with one's own personal conflicts, one must work together with many people to change "conditions."

That is what Hillel meant when he said, "If I am not for myself, who will be for me, and if I am only for myself, what am I?": Certainly one should be interested in himself; every human being wants to be as happy as possible; but one cannot achieve that happiness alone. One must work together with others in order to achieve it.

It is therefore necessary to see the other half of the picture: what society should be like. It must be based upon cooperation: it must give people every chance to work together for the good of all. Later on, in Chapter VI, we shall discuss more fully what cooperation means. Individuals can never be happy so long as people think of life as a war in which the strong, and only the strong, can win. So long as people are greedy and desire to take advantage of their fellow men, they will always create conflict; there will be no peace, no friendship, no sympathy.

Of course, we realize that the ideal of peace and cooperation will very likely not be achieved within the

next few years; we who are alive today may not even live to see the ideal achieved. But that does not mean that we should not *work for the ideal, and believe in it*. In that sense, the perfect life lies in the World to come, in the world which perhaps the next generation or the generation after will enjoy. But in the meantime we are living lives that are worthwhile, because we are devoting them to a worthwhile goal. Until the ideal is reached, the perfect life will be the one which is dedicated to working *toward* the ideal.

Our picture of the perfect world, therefore, makes us want to go out and work toward achieving it. This is the advantage which it has over the picture of the perfect world that our ancestors had. Their religion taught them to sit back and wait for the coming of the Messiah, and those who criticize the ideas of our ancestors do so just because these ideas do not tell us what we must do. Indeed, those ideas stand in the way of progress: those who have beautiful ideals sit back and wait, while those who have evil plans are up and doing. For example, most Americans believe that there should be no hatred between one race and another, or between members of different religious groups. Yet, if we look about us, we realize that few people are really dedicated to improving relations between races. Many white people feel sorry for the sad situation of the Negroes; but, how many actually change their own habits based on prejudice? How many try to influence their families and their friends to treat Negroes the way they treat all other people?

We should make up our minds that the perfect life is

not to be found in some new world in the far distant future, but is to be found on this earth, and as soon as men determine to bring it into being.

3. *The Sabbath Helps Us to Live the Perfect Life*

We have seen that the Sabbath is the symbol of the perfect world. However, it is more than just a symbol. The observance of the Sabbath is one of the ways in which we can help ourselves to live the perfect life. How does the average man spend his week? Is it not almost always in *working*, and rushing about, and struggling? When a person spends all his time at work, he never gets a chance to stop and think where his work is leading him. Is he making the most of himself? Is he being loyal to proper ideas? There is not much joy in a life that is so filled with activity that no room is left for considering the value of that work. Resting on the Sabbath, therefore, is very important because it helps people to give some thought to the question: am I getting closer to the perfect life?

The Sabbath can help not only the individual; it helps the community as well. In the past, when Jews came together to worship on the Sabbath, they came together as members of one community, to stand aside for a while from the hustle and bustle of living, and to consider whether their social life was measuring up to the standards which they had set. In addition, it gave them an opportunity to state once again their faith

that it was possible for life to be perfect. This coming together, their prayers, their observances, made them feel like new people, refreshed and young again. That is why the Rabbis of old used to say that on the Sabbath Jews received "an additional soul." They felt so joyous that it seemed to them that their one soul could not contain all their joy, that therefore they must have *two souls.*

We may ask the question: on what did our ancestors base their faith that it was possible for life to be perfect? What was there about the Sabbath which made it possible for them to feel so sure of their statements? The answer is: they based their faith upon three facts which, in their belief, had to do with the Sabbath. (1) The fact that God had created the world (and rested, after finishing the creation, on the seventh day), and found the world "very good." (2) The fact that the Prophets had considered the Sabbath as "holy." (3) The fact that God had made a covenant, or agreement, with the Jewish people, promising them certain things, and that this covenant was symbolized by the Sabbath. Just exactly what these three facts mean will be explained, one at a time, in the following sections.

4. *What Is the Meaning of: "God Created the World"?*

In former times, our ancestors believed that God, the great Being, created the world out of *nothing.* This

was something, they thought, which no human being could accomplish. We can change things: we can make steel out of iron, and fire out of coal, but we cannot create iron or coal. We must find them already prepared for us. But God made everything out of nothing. Now, of course, some bright children always ask, "But, who made God?" That is a good question; it is a question which no one ever could answer, and it always left the questioner feeling unsatisfied.

Today, however, this whole question of how the world came into being in the beginning has little value for us, because we do not know the answer, and even if we did know the answer, it would not help us to learn how to live. The answer would not tell us what the perfect life is like, or how to achieve it, and that is what we are most interested in.

Nevertheless, from our point of view, it is very valuable for us to think of God as the *creator*, providing that we mean by this the following: the world is constructed in such a way that *anything is possible*, that new and interesting and good things can always be discovered or invented. Life is constantly changing, and we may look forward to the creation of new conditions, new ideas, new habits in people, new kinds of conduct. Creation, in other words, is always going on; it has not stopped and it never will stop, and the fact that this process of creation or change is always going on is one of the ways in which we come to understand that God is in the world.

If we keep this idea clearly in mind, we derive great

benefit from it. For example, some people say: "All is vanity." They mean: it is useless to try to change the world. The evils that we suffer from have always been with us, and will always remain with us. If, on the other hand, we retort that *creation* is always going on, we overcome this discouraging thought. We have faith once again in our ideals. We may ask: how do we know that creation is always going on? The answer is: we must try to understand ourselves, and if we do, we will discover that process taking place within our very own hearts. We are always changing. Every time we take a breath, we are bringing new life into our bodies. We grow, we learn, we develop certain skills that we did not know before. All this is *creation*.

Some people who have had sad experiences may sometimes come to the hasty conclusion that life is sad. This is a mistake. We dare not make statements about all of life, based upon our lives alone, because if we do we are seeing life in a very narrow way, and we are not fair to it, nor to ourselves. Let us suppose that a boy tries to swim a certain distance, and fails. Would it be intelligent for his friends to conclude that it is impossible for *anyone* to swim that distance? Would it be intelligent for the boy himself to conclude that he cannot do it? No! He does not realize that with training and added effort, he could do the distance too. Suppose that in his second try he succeeds: where, we may ask, did he get the strength or the skill to succeed? Certainly, the *same* boy swam the same distance, and yet the first time he failed and the second time he succeeded. This is

what we mean by creation. He uncovered certain *reserves*, or developed in such a way, as to be able to succeed the second time. *Development* is creation, and because development is possible, we should never despair about the possibility of anything.

Are there wars? Yes. Does that mean there will always be wars? No. Is there poverty? Yes. Does that mean that there will always be poverty? No. This faith in the power of creation we declare on the Sabbath, and the Sabbath should be dedicated to that faith.

5. *What Is the Meaning of "God's Covenant With Israel"?*

Our ancestors differed from the other ancient peoples, especially from the ancient Greeks, in their idea of history. According to the Greek philosophers, all human life is an attempt to break away from the grip of Fate. Fate, to their way of thinking, was a kind of god who, at the beginning of all things, decided exactly what was going to happen to each and every individual person. Since each one's life was planned in advance, no one could do anything about it. And no matter how hard anyone tried to direct his own life according to his own will, the effort was bound to end in defeat—because Fate had already made its decision.

The Greeks had many great writers, who wrote plays; and in these plays we get a clear picture of how they thought. They believed, for example, that mortals could

never be released from a calamity which had been "predestined" — that is, arranged by Fate beforehand. There is a story, for example, of a man named Oedipus who was fated to kill his own father; the gods had decreed this terrible tragedy. In a play written by the famous Greek playwright, Sophocles, we are shown how, no matter how Oedipus tries, he cannot avoid his "fate"; and in the end, he actually does kill his father. Those who tried to defy Fate were regarded by the Greeks as heroes, not because they succeeded—for they could not succeed—but because they tried.

In our own day as well, many people still think as the ancient Greeks thought. They say that they "believe in Fate." Have we not often heard people say, "What is the use of trying? I believe in Fate. If we are fated to be successful, we will be; and if we are fated to be failures, we will be failures." Even some scientists and writers tell us that outward conditions decide our fate for us, and nothing we do can be of any help. If we happen to be born with certain kinds of ability, or grow up in certain circumstances, we simply cannot overcome these conditions. This kind of thinking is just like that of the ancient Greeks, except that modern people use different language; actually, they believe in Fate.

According to our ancestors, life is not decided by Fate at all. Life is governed by God, who is the Creator. This should mean to us that whatever evils we find in the world are merely those parts of the world which have not yet been touched by the creative power. It is as though we were cleaning our house with a

vacuum cleaner, and we found a whole pile of dirt in one corner of a room. We would not say that the dirt was "fated" to be there; we would say, "We haven't yet gotten around to that corner. When we do, we will clean it up and the dirt will disappear." When the power of creation is applied to the evils of the world, they will disappear. If the evils which we hate are still with us, it is because we have not yet gotten around to them. It is true that, even when cleaning a house, by the time we clean up one corner new dust has accumulated in the corners which we have already cleaned; and in life, too, new evils are always arising. Perhaps we shall never be able to make the house absolutely clean, nor the world absolutely good. But at least we are sure that it all depends on us, and not on Fate, and that our efforts count for something.

The Jewish people has taken the same attitude toward its own history. The Jews have suffered and have been persecuted in many lands and in many centuries. But never did our people say, "We are victims of Fate." On the contrary, they looked upon their sufferings as part of God's covenant with Abraham. According to this agreement, Israel, the Jewish people, would one day become a blessing for all mankind, a source of inspiration to all the nations. Suffering, therefore, was regarded by the Jews as a *test*. This means: they believed that God was trying to see whether they had the strength to hold out and to keep their faith. According to tradition, God tested Abraham himself, by asking him to sacrifice Isaac on the altar. When Abraham showed that he was willing to do even this,

God was satisfied that Abraham was the right kind of man to found a nation. Now the author of this story was trying to point out that very often our strength of character is tested by hardships and difficulties, and that we should not regard them as the blind workings of Fate.

Our ancestors went even further. They said that not only must we not think that Fate—or Satan—is responsible for evil in the world, but we must *thank God* for evil the way we thank God for good. What does it mean to thank God for evil? Can we be really thankful when unfortunate happenings occur? What we really mean is: we should not let the evil that we meet *affect* our faith in God. This means that we should think of the evil as an opportunity for us to make use of our faith in God in order to destroy the evil.

There is, however, one important difference between the attitude which we should take and the attitude of our ancestors. They believed that no evil in the world could not be overcome by God. They believed, however, that God, as a great Being, would have to perform a miracle in order to destroy the evil. Today, we modern Jews must believe that God, the Creator, the Power that makes life worthwhile, is in us as well, and that our creative power, our intelligence and our strong will are the workings of God in us. And even though we find that conditions in life are not what we think they ought to be, nevertheless, by exercising our creative power, we can *transform* the world, so that it will measure up to our hopes.

When, according to the Bible, God finished all the work which He had done, He said it was "very good," and rested on the seventh day. The Sabbath for us must be the same occasion to step aside, look at the world, and say, "It is very good—not yet, but, by our efforts and determination, it will be very soon."

6. *What Is the Meaning of "Holiness"?*

The word "holy" is one which people do not use in our day as much as they used to use it in times gone by. For that reason it is not as familiar to us as it once was, and we need to have this word explained. All religions use the word "holy," but its meaning is different in different countries and at different periods in history. The definition given here is chosen because that definition helps us to understand the *one* meaning which people had in mind at all times and everywhere. Underlying all the different definitions, we can find one idea which all have in common.

The word "holy" always means *important*. When anything is called holy, it is considered important in life. For example, we Americans consider the Constitution an *important* document; the American flag the most *important* flag. The Jews consider the Torah the most important book for them, the Sabbath and Festivals extremely important days, and so on. This is what we mean by "holidays"—*holy* days, days that are extremely important.

How do certain things become "holy"? They be-

come holy not of themselves alone. After all, a flag is only a piece of cloth, and a book is only paper or parchment. Their value comes from the ideals with which they are associated. When they bring to mind those ideals, they come to have holiness. Sometimes, of course, the actual word "holiness" is not used in connection with them; for example, we rarely hear anyone saying that the Constitution is holy, but if we were to use the language of religion in connection with the way we Americans feel about the Constitution, we would have to use the word holy.

The Sabbath was called "holy"; and from that fact we learn two things: first, how important it was in the lives of our people, and second, how the idea of holiness itself plays a part in our lives. In some people's lives, holiness plays no part at all, because for them nothing is sacred, or holy, or important. These people are called "cynics"; that is, they do not seem to care enough about anything to consider it "most important." They are indifferent to conditions, indifferent to other people, and, in some cases, go so far as to be indifferent to themselves. Their own lives are not important in their own eyes. They do not care much whether they have friends or not, whether justice or injustice rules, whether there is war or peace. They simply do not care what happens.

To feel the way they do is to be, we think, very unfortunate. On the other hand, Jewish religion has always tried to teach that God is holy. What did our ancestors mean by saying that God is holy? They meant that

life itself is of utmost importance, and it is wrong to be indifferent to life. On the Sabbath, joy reigned supreme, because each week on the Sabbath Jews declared again and again that life was worthwhile. *Oneg Shabbat* is the phrase used to describe this feeling: "joy of Sabbath."

Our ancestors certainly suffered enough. They knew what it meant to be hated and persecuted; nevertheless, they said: "Life is good, life is important, life is *holy*." They did not shut their eyes to the evils of the world; but they also did not permit those evils to break their spirit.

We may ask the question: Of all that life and the world contain what is *most* important? The answer is: MAN. Human beings are, so to speak, holy. How did our ancestors express this thought? They expressed it when they said that God created man "in His image." Man, they believed, was created to resemble God. Did they mean that God looked like human beings? No. They meant that of all the whole creation, only man has the intelligence and the understanding which enables him to realize that life is important and sacred. This is what the writer of the Psalm meant when he said: "Thou hast made him (Man) little lower than the angels." Human beings have within them the power to change the world in such a way that it shall become extremely worthwhile and a fit place to live in.

For this reason, every human being must be looked upon as *holy*, as sacred, as deserving honor and respect. For this reason, we should treat our fellow men with con-

sideration and love and reverence. Whatever leads to the shame or dishonor or unhappiness of people is unholy, and therefore wrong.

7. *How Can Judaism Help the Jew to Live the Perfect Life?*

Nobody lives completely alone. Only those who live on desert islands, like Robinson Crusoe, live completely by themselves; but, as we know, their lives are not normal lives. The normal person always lives together with others. The perfect life is one in which an individual lives with others in peace and justice. There can be no problem of peace when there are *no people* with whom one might quarrel. And there is no problem of justice when there are *no people* to whom to be unjust. In other words, we must always think of the perfect life as being lived in a group; we call this a *social group* (because it is made up of people).

Our ancestors, living among themselves, found in the companionship of their fellow Jews the way to as perfect a life as they could possibly achieve. According to their beliefs, God was always watching over them. Their Torah they believed to be the most wonderful set of laws ever created. Their teachers made them understand that life was always going to bring them greater and greater joy, and that they were *not* under the spell of Fate, or of any evil power. Even when they suffered, they realized that the suffering was a test of their strength, and not due

to the wicked cruelty of some evil god. No wonder they always used to say, "How happy are we. How good is our lot." They always thanked God for having chosen them from among all the peoples of the world to enjoy His special care.

Compare their attitude toward their Jewishness with the attitude we find among Jews today: many Jews today are unhappy being Jews. They sometimes secretly wish they were not Jews. Why?

The answer is: in those days, our people derived so much joy from their way of life, their Sabbaths and Festivals, their teachers and their books, their celebrations and their whole program of Jewish living, that they imagined that God must have singled them out for such a privilege. As long as they believed that God had chosen them to be a special kind of people, nothing that happened to them could make them feel discouraged. Today most Jews have given up the idea that they are a chosen people. They have done so because they realize that the Jews were not the only people who believed themselves to be chosen; we know that other nations also took great joy in their way of living, in their language and history, their customs and Festivals.

It is not necessary for us to keep the idea of the "chosen people," however, in order to find in Jewish life a path to the perfect life. The thing for us to do is to try to make our Jewish life so interesting, so worthwhile, that we shall be able to find life itself worthwhile through living as Jews. This does not mean that we must believe everything that our ancestors believed, or act in exactly

the same way that they acted. Times change, and we must change with the times. But by looking back at the past, we can get many suggestions as to how to face life and how to make our own lives as perfect as possible.

By doing this, we are also contributing to the rest of the world. In our day, no nation lives alone—just as no individual ever lives alone. Whatever we Jews accomplish quickly becomes known to the rest of the world, and if there is any value in what we create the rest of the world can benefit from it. How can we become what our ancestors always hoped we would become: *a holy nation*? We can become a holy nation by becoming a *most important* nation, that is, by acting in such a way that others will want to imitate us, by living so justly and so peacefully that others will learn from us. Then we shall really be important and valuable to the world. And then Jews will again be happy to be Jews, and they will again be able to say, "How happy are we."

SOME THOUGHTS ON CHAPTER I

1. If you entered a Jewish home at dinner time on Friday evening, what would show that it *was* Friday evening?
2. "The lion is the symbol of courage." "White is the symbol of purity." This is how the dictionary helps to explain what a symbol is. Give other examples of a symbol. Put into your own words the idea which the Sabbath is supposed to symbolize.

3. The world as you see it about you is, we all agree, "imperfect." Suppose you had the power to make it "perfect." What would you change?
4. If you asked the traditional Jew to tell you the story of the world, from the beginning (briefly, of course), explaining the place of the Jewish people in that story, he would have a ready answer. Do you know what that answer would be?
5. In high schools and colleges, students take up science, and learn a great deal about the origin of the world. The story of creation in the Bible is quite different. Is the biblical story true? In what sense? What difference does it make whether we say "God created" the world, or whether we say the world "just happened"?
6. When we talk about a better world, we mean, among other things, better relations between races and peoples. Ask yourself: do you really believe that Negroes would be as good as whites if they had the same opportunities? How do you feel about "foreigners"? Do you consider them inferior to native-born Americans? Make a list of the way in which you could help bring about better feeling between yourself and your neighbors of other colors or religions.
7. Suffering is often an opportunity, as was the case of Franklin D. Roosevelt. Do you know how he made use of his illness to develop himself? Think of other examples.
8. In World Wars I and II, soldiers often said, "If the bullet has your number on it, you're licked." What

does this strange language mean? Is there any relation between it and the idea of Fate? The religious Jew does not believe in Fate; he says he believes "in God." What's the difference?

9. Everyone wants to be happy. Some people think they can be happy even though they are cynics. Give some examples of a "cynical" attitude, and see if you could defend your side of a debate entitled "Resolved, that cynics cannot be happy."
10. The Jewish people has always believed that it was a "chosen" people. This idea is being questioned by many in our day. Do you think Jews would act differently from the way they do now if they stopped believing that they were "chosen"? Do you think any nation on earth has the right to call itself "chosen"?

ROSH HA-SHANAH:

SYMBOL OF A BETTER WORLD

WE HAVE SEEN

how the Sabbath can become once more a worthwhile institution for us, by having it symbolize the perfect life. If we examine the other holidays in the Jewish calendar, we will discover how they too can become important in our lives, by symbolizing other important ideas. At the present time, the holidays which all Jews observe, no matter how indifferent they may be to Jewish life, are Rosh Ha-Shanah and Yom Kippur. They are known as *yamim noraim*, or Solemn Days, because on those days Jews are especially conscious of their religion.

Our ancestors set these days aside in order to emphasize what they called the "kingship of God." What did they mean by this? They meant that on these days Jews should again become aware of the fact that God is the ruler of the entire universe. Why was it necessary to emphasize this fact? Our ancestors felt that this was necessary, in very early times, because the rest of the world continued to worship other gods, because they had not yet been able to see that the God of Israel was indeed the only God, and that all the other gods were not really gods at all.

Later, our ancestors considered it necessary to em-

phasize that God was King because they felt that as long as there was war, and injustice, and as long as people continued to be superstitious and believed in all kinds of magic, God was not really accepted by the whole world. We now understand, also, another reason why God's kingship needed to be stressed, and that was because our ancestors believed that all human kings, rulers over empires, were kings only by the consent of God. Since that was the case, their position depended upon their obedience to God's laws. The Jews imagined God as an invisible ruler who ruled over human kings, and the purpose of the human kings was to see to it that God's laws were obeyed by their peoples. God's laws, according to our ancestors, were to be found in the Torah, and as long as the kings of the empires failed to make the Torah the constitution of their nations, they were not accepting God as King. Our ancestors believed that this was the reason why the perfect life had not yet come.

Thus, the idea that God was King had to do with the hope that, sooner or later, the world would be changed into a perfect one. When would this happen?—when society, men and women and children, nations and communities, would be *made over*, with the help of God. The power to make over the world came, according to them, only from God. How is it, we may ask, that after so many hundreds of years the world is still filled with wars and hatred? The answer to this question may be found by examining closely just what our ancestors' idea of a king was. They believed that the king was responsible for the behavior of everybody. People were

expected only to obey the king; the king himself was supposed to dictate what was right and what was wrong. Man's job was merely to follow instructions, and to wait and hope that, some day, the perfect life would come.

In our day, we have a very different idea of the duties of citizens in a State. We no longer believe that the job of men and women is merely to obey the rules, or that the responsibility for the good life rests only on the king. In fact, many of us no longer accept the idea of a "king"; we believe in democracy. What is "democracy"? Democracy is a form of government in which the power rests in the people themselves. We might say: the people are the *king*, or, kingship belongs to the people, and not to any one person. This is the case in our political life. In the same way, in our religious life, we must no longer think of God as a Being outside of the world that rules over the world, and whom people must obey without question.

The kingship of God must mean for us that the Power which is in us, that helps us to work for our ideals, must be king; that is, must rule us. We must be governed, in our behavior, by our desire to be at our best. When we declare the kingship of God, we say: "We believe that if we permit the Power within us to rule us, we will be able to make over the world in accordance with our ideals." According to this idea, there is no difference between the religious and the non-religious part of our lives. Some people believe that some activities are religious, and others non-religious; that some actions were commanded by God and are, therefore, religious,

while others, of less importance, are entirely up to the people themselves. We should not divide our lives into religious actions and non-religious actions. *All* our actions should be carried out on the basis of our religious beliefs. This is possible so long as we understand that belief in God, as King of the universe, means belief in our own ability to make over the world. Making over the world leaves nothing out; it includes our behavior as children, as brothers, as sisters, as parents, as citizens, as friends—in fact, the sum of *all* our actions.

The question arises: what sort of behavior is necessary in order to make over the world? Our answer will be divided into two parts: (1) how individuals should behave, and (2) how we should behave as members of a group, like the family, the city, the State, nation, or the human race as a whole.

1. *How Individuals Must Behave*

How important is one human being? Sometimes we are likely to think that one human being does not count for much. Just imagine how many people there are in the world: millions upon millions! Suppose one person gets killed, does that matter in the history of the world? If one hundred people are drowned in a flood, aren't there still millions and millions more left?

That is one way of looking at the question. But the Jewish religion has always taught another way. It is this: each and every human being is *sacred*. Let us recall

how we defined the word "sacred"; it means *important*, most important. Our ancestors used to say that every human being has in him a soul (*neshamah*), which came from God Himself. They believed that this soul was eternal, that is, would live on forever, and could never be destroyed. And because each person had a soul, he was responsible to God for his every action. According to our ancestors, God gave each person this soul on condition that he keep it pure, free from sin. It was therefore the first duty of every human being to watch his behavior; God Himself was interested in it.

That is how important our ancestors thought a human being was. Of course, they realized that people live only a short time, and that human beings sometimes seem to be like little ants in comparison to the oceans and mountains and forests—just as the ants seem to us to be unimportant (especially *one* ant which we step on without thinking). Nevertheless, they realized that a nation is, after all, composed of a large number of individual human beings, and that in the long run no king or president could rule over that nation if there were not enough single human beings, banded together, who wanted him. If a society is wicked, if there is strife and quarreling and dishonesty, it is because there are individual human beings who are committing these wrongs.

An illustration might help us to understand the importance of each human being. Take, for example, a book. A book consists of many pages; each page of many lines; each line of several words; each word of several

letters. Now, you may ask, how important is any one letter, or one word? It is true that one word is not in itself very important, but when that word forms part of a sentence, it becomes valuable, and when that sentence forms part of a paragraph, and thus part of a page, and thus part of a chapter and part of a book . . . then the individual word has contributed toward a large piece of work, which alone it could never have done. On the other hand, without that word, the book would not have been complete. In the same way, a human being by himself may not be able to do very much; with others he can accomplish great things, but those great things could never be accomplished except for this man and that woman, and that woman and this man, each and every one a valuable worker and contributor.

If this is the case, then we learn something at once about the kind of behavior we must follow as individuals. Just as a word torn out of a book makes very little sense, so a person who detaches himself from his fellow men, and worries only about himself, is doing a very foolish thing. Sooner or later, that person gets "fed up" with his own little interests and hobbies. He gets bored, and he soon realizes that he counts for nothing, that no one is interested in him (why should anyone be?), and that if he should disappear no one would miss him. As soon as he begins to feel that way, he loses all the joy of living. Rather does it seem more natural for people to give themselves—their time and efforts—to some cause, or movement, in which others are also interested, and

to which they too are contributing something of themselves.

Look at the doctor, for example: he is probably one of the happiest persons in the world. Why? Because he is devoting his time and energies to helping others. This does not mean that he is not also helping himself; surely, he is helping himself. He is making a livelihood, he is doing the kind of work he enjoys. But there is something more: he is working at some problem which affects other people; he is working not only for himself. Therefore, if he were to die, many people would miss him sorely. He knows that, and that makes his heart happy. We all, deep down in our hearts, want to feel that we would be missed. *Nobody misses a selfish person*, or one who is a nuisance to society, or one who acts in such a way as to make society want to do away with him.

On Rosh Ha-Shanah, in the synagogue, we recite a number of prayers which deal with these ideas. They all describe the holiday as being a Day of Judgment. Of course, in ancient times, our ancestors believed that God actually sat upon His throne on this day and examined the records of each person: the completely wicked were immediately convicted, the completely good were immediately released, and the large numbers of people who were just average were given a period of ten days (the Ten Days of Penitence) between Rosh Ha-Shanah and Yom Kippur in which to pray and plead for forgiveness.

Modern people no longer take this picture of the

Day of Judgment to be a picture of what really happens. But it gives us a very clear idea of what our ancestors thought it best to stress on Rosh Ha-Shanah: our sense of responsibility, and the importance of each human being. Rosh Ha-Shanah should be for us the time to sit in judgment upon ourselves, and to ask ourselves: "Have I lived selfishly? Have I been interested only in my own welfare? Have I shirked responsibilities? and so on.

And then, when the Shofar sounds, we can interpret its call the way our ancestors did, as a "salute to the King." This means that when we declare the kingship of God and say to ourselves, "I believe that human beings have the power to make over the world in accordance with the principles of peace and justice," we can also say, in all honesty: "I want to count myself among those who are trying to make over the world. I can do very little by myself; but I can do much together with others. I am an important member of society. Society would miss me if I were to disappear. I am an important human being." Life would then seem very worthwhile indeed.

2. *How Groups Must Behave*

So long as people believed that God was a Being living somewhere out of the world, they did not imagine that it was their business to change the world. That was God's task. The task of men was to obey the Law of God; and Jews believed that that Law was contained in

the Torah. Today, however, people do not any longer believe in God as existing only outside the world. They believe in God also as a force that lives inside themselves. The responsibility for making over the world, therefore, rests on the shoulders of men and women.

Another reason why people, in the past, left the job of remaking the world to God was that they felt so helpless in the face of all their problems. They did not know how to go about solving them. They knew very little about nature, about what makes the world go round, about how to control disease. Today, however, after science and experience have helped us to understand so much about the world around us, we have developed a different attitude. Now we have not any longer the right to leave the problems of the world to others—or to a God who lives in Heaven. We must face the problems ourselves. We must learn to understand that when we do face these problems honestly and courageously, we are permitting that Power within us to work, that Power which we call God.

How must we behave, as a group—as a family or as a nation or as humanity—in order that we may solve our problems? This is the most important question which we have to answer in our day. The answer to that question will bring about the perfect world which all of us constantly hope for and work for. Of course, many people make fun of any picture of the perfect world which may be painted. They say we are day-dreaming; we are not facing the facts. They use the word "Utopia": Utopia was the name which a thinker, Sir Thomas More, many

centuries ago, gave to a description of the perfect State, and since then, whenever anyone wants to say that an ideal is impossible, he calls it "Utopian." But by calling an ideal Utopian, we do not help matters much. It is true that sometimes we paint pictures of the future as we would like the future to be, and we wish for the impossible.

But, nevertheless, there is a great advantage in picturing Utopias because by doing so we set up goals toward which to work. It may be that we shall not get to those goals, but at least we can have something by which to judge ourselves. Are we making progress? Are we getting nearer to what we want? Compare our lives as they are with our picture of the perfect world—and we have a way of judging ourselves.

For example: what kind of world do we want, in regard to wealth? How much should each person have? How much is every individual entitled to? We should say that, in "Utopia," every man and woman would have enough to eat and drink, a house to live in, enough money for recreation, for health, for education. Every man and woman should not have to worry about the future, about the time when he or she will be old and unable to work. No one should have to worry about his children, whether they will be clothed and cared for. Let us ask: what is the situation today? In many lands, and even in some parts of our land, large masses of people are poor, live in terrible houses, have not enough to eat, and are always worried about the future.

What kind of States should there be? We feel that

every State should have a government which is elected by the people, and conducted for the benefit of the people. Every man and woman should have a voice in the government; officials should be elected to do the will of the people. What is the situation today? In many large countries, the masses of the people have nothing to say. These nations are governed by a few men who *dictate* to the nation. No one has a right to express an opinion. Here, certainly, we have a chance to compare what we have with what we should like to have.

Another example: in a perfect world every boy and girl would get an education, the kind of education which would help each one to live a good and useful life. No boy or girl would have to leave school at an early age in order to go to work, but would be able to stay on and learn enough to become a really cultured and useful person. What is the situation today? Thousands of boys and girls do not attend school, simply because their parents cannot afford to send them, or because there are not enough schools to take care of all the children.

Many other examples could be given. But the main thought is this: we must have a clear picture of what kind of world we want before we can judge what changes have to be made in our present world. We must have "vision"; otherwise, we grope about in the dark, not knowing where we want to go or whether we are making any progress. Furthermore, we must continue to see in all our efforts at bettering the world the working of God in us. In that way, we shall never lose our courage or our hope.

3. *How to Keep Up Our Courage Until the World Is Remade*

It will be a long time before the world is remade according to our hopes. In the meantime, there is great danger that we may lose our courage and our faith. It is important, therefore, for us to know how to face the troubles of the world. What shall our attitude be? First, we should not think of people as being, by nature, wicked. For a long time, in fact, for many centuries, people were taught that men and women were born with wicked natures, and that all their training and education were necessary in order to overcome their wickedness. They were taught that, in the beginning, Adam, the first man, sinned, and that his children and their children ever after might easily be led into sin. We should accept this idea of our natures.

We should believe that people grow up in the world with all the best intentions to be good and to do good, to be cooperative, helpful, and just—and that when they fail to live up to their good intentions it is because they are forced by conditions to do so. For example: most people want to be honest; if they are dishonest it is because they find that they cannot make a livelihood any other way. Or perhaps they are dishonest because they are sick, mentally sick; they try to be honest but something makes them do the wrong thing, something inside of them which they cannot control.

If we take this attitude, we are much encouraged, because we then have some hope of making everyone honest:

by changing conditions or by curing the sick we can achieve our goal. From the other point of view, we have little hope—for if by nature we are wicked, we have little chance of making progress.

Secondly, we must learn to look for encouraging signs. There are many people who can see only the dark side: the wars, the injustice, the poverty, the sickness. They overlook so many hopeful and encouraging facts. For example, they fail to realize how much progress we have made since one hundred years ago. Today science has made it possible for us to build strong houses, bridges, subways, airplanes, radios, TV, steamships; the world is no longer a vast mysterious place. We can travel and learn. We are closer together than we ever were before; and we therefore have a better *chance* of being friendly with one another. Science has wiped out many diseases which used to destroy thousands of lives. We live longer these days, and we live healthier lives.

In addition, we have come to look upon many evils in the world as being not *natural*; that is to say, we no longer think, for example, that war *has to happen*. In the olden days, people used to think that wars had to happen and that nothing could be done to abolish them. In fact, our own Prophets, who hoped for world peace, could not imagine war being abolished by men; they believed that it would be necessary for God to change the whole world and bring peace. Whereas, today, even though we have not yet found the solution, we are working on the problem of peace, believing that the abolition of war is *within our power*. Is that not a great advance?

Furthermore, it is not right for us to think only about the men and women who are selfish and who work only for their own benefit. If we do, we are tempted to think that they are the only kind of people in the world, that all men and women are like that. This is a mistake. Think of the thousands of unselfish and idealistic people who, day by day, month by month, work in science laboratories, trying to cure our illnesses or prevent epidemics. Think of a great heroine like Madame Curie, the discoverer of radium. She devoted her entire life to the welfare of humanity, always searching for a way of curing diseases. Think of men like Toscanini, the remarkable musician and conductor, who sacrificed fortunes for his principles. He refused to go to those countries where people were oppressed and enslaved. They are the *real heroes* of our day. Think of their self-sacrifice and their idealism, and we will not imagine that *all* people are selfish and think only of themselves.

Lastly, we must realize that today there are more people than there ever were before who are literate, who know how to read and write. In former times, when most people were ignorant, tyrants were able to keep their power more easily. People did not know what was going on, and they usually took the word of their leaders as truth, without questioning. Today, this is not so common. With books, magazines and newspapers, radios and movies, people are very wide awake. As a result, they are not so easily led by people who are interested only in themselves. People are giving a great deal of thought

these days to the problems of justice and peace. Is that not in itself a sign that we are making progress?

Thus, we must not jump to the conclusion that the world is not going forward. It is true that we have still a long way to go before we can say that we have remade the world; nevertheless, if we remember that (1) people are not really wicked, but are really good and sincere and do the right thing if only they have a chance; (2) we must not always look at the dark side of life but must give our attention to the encouraging signs; (3) Man has the power to do away with bad conditions; (4) there are many unselfish people with ideals, and (5) the spread of education helps us to rally the masses of the people to the cause of justice and peace—if we remember all these facts, we will then be able to keep up our courage, until the world is remade.

4. *Is There Idolatry Today?*

One of the most important prayers said on Rosh Ha-Shanah is that which begins: *Alenu le-shabeah*. . . . In this prayer, we pray that people may no longer worship idols. Are there idols today? If not, why should we continue to pray in this manner? Certainly, we rarely see anyone making clay or wooden idols, and thinking them gods. Yet, if we study the matter more closely, we realize that people do worship idols, not exactly as they used to worship idols in days gone by, but in another way.

We have been trying to point out that religion, or our idea of God, makes our lives worthwhile. Whenever men and women find an ideal for which they are willing to give up their lives, for which they are willing to make any sacrifices, we may be sure that that ideal is a *religion* for them. Is this not a good thing, that people should be so willing to give up everything for the sake of an ideal? Yes—and no. It is wonderful to see people religious—but it is a terrible thing to see them religious *if the ideal for which they are willing to give up everything is harmful and dangerous*. Can you imagine anyone making a religion of a harmful or dangerous thing? Let us see. Suppose one were to say: "I would give up everything for my country." Would such a person not be considered a very patriotic person? Certainly. Yet patriotism can be very harmful; for example, if your country were to start a war against another country in order to steal some territory away from that other country, would your country be doing the right thing? No. Now, if your country asked you to become a soldier and fight against that foreign land, would you be doing the right thing by obeying your country's command?

Patriotism is a very beautiful idea, but it is not beautiful enough. By that we mean that loyalty to the men and women of your particular land is not enough; one should be loyal to the men and women of the whole world. Are not foreign men and women also human, also children of God? If so, we should do nothing that would harm others. Sometimes patriotism makes us do

harmful things to others. *Whenever a person makes a religion of his patriotism, he is worshiping a false god.*

This is what we mean by idolatry today—worshiping false gods, gods which are harmful, even though they may bring out in us our loyalty and self-sacrifice. We know, for example, that there is great loyalty and devotion among the members of a gang. Gangsters will often refuse to reveal the names of their partners, and will sometimes go to jail or even to the electric chair, when they might save themselves by "squealing" on their friends. But no one would say that this kind of loyalty is the kind we should try to imitate. Why? Because it is a loyalty to a small group, a group which, as a whole, is an enemy of society.

If we are to make God King over the whole world, we must give our first loyalty to the whole world, and not to any particular *part* of it. That is what our ancestors meant when they said that there is one God in the whole world; they meant that *all* men are brothers.

On Rosh Ha-Shanah, we should emphasize the kingship of God; in addition to the other ideas which we have mentioned, this idea should be stressed: that false gods which are harmful must be given up.

SOME THOUGHTS ON CHAPTER II

1. There are very few kings left in the world today, because most nations have decided to set up "democracies." Is there any reason now for speaking

of "God as King" or for saying that "God should rule over us"? This is not too easy to understand, but it is important to get a clear idea of the thought behind it.

2. "Sacred" is almost the same as "holy," and we talk of "holy days." Is there such a thing as sacred people, or holy people? Which people ought to be treated as sacred? Describe how you would act toward people if you considered them sacred.
3. You often hear someone say, "My conscience hurt after I did that." Where does it hurt? Is it a good pain or a harmful one?
4. A selfish man is a lonely man. Do you agree? Why? Do you think a selfish man's opinion of his fellow men may have something to do with making him selfish? Does this make sense: Being *unselfish* is, in the long run, the most *selfish* thing to be?
5. If there were really three Books in Heaven, opened on Rosh Ha-Shanah, which book would have the most names in it? Do you think anybody you know would deserve to go into the book of the "completely wicked"? Consider the image of the three books as though it were part of a poem, and explain why it is true.
6. The Shofar call is something like a bugle call. What does that mean? Suppose you had to compose a "Pledge of Allegiance" to God, what would you include?
7. Did you ever play "If"? The idea of the game is to tell what you would do: if you had a million

- dollars, if you were king, if you could make yourself invisible, etc. Most of these "ifs" have something to do with making oneself richer, stronger, or in one way or another, getting some advantage over others. Why not play the game of "If" and ask: "What would I do if I could help others throughout the world?" And then ask: "What good does it do to play this game anyhow?"
8. If we do not want to lose hope in the future, we must be "optimistic." We must see the best side of every situation and every person. This is what Pollyanna did. Who was she, and what was wrong with her? What should be done to get the benefits of being like Pollyanna, without the disadvantages?
 9. When the famous nurse, Edith Cavell, was shot by the Germans in the First World War, she cried, "Patriotism is not enough!" Why not? Does this mean people should not be patriotic? What does it mean?
 10. Have you ever stayed up long enough on New Year's Eve to witness its celebration? People generally blow horns and put on paper hats and make a lot of noise. Jews have happy days in their calendar too, but Rosh Ha-Shanah is not one of them. It is quite solemn. The Jewish New Year is a *religious* day. Explain the difference between January 1 (or December 31) and Rosh Ha-Shanah. Do you think the Jews were right to make Rosh Ha-Shanah a serious occasion?

YOM KIPPUR:

SYMBOL OF HUMAN
NATURE REMADE

THE PURPOSE OF YOM KIPPUR (the Day of Atonement) is to make us think about how to do what is right, and be at our best, all the time. Our ancestors, in setting aside this one day for prayer and fasting, expected that we would devote it to the problem of our conduct. That is what they meant by saying that on Yom Kippur our sins are forgiven as a result of repentance.

"Sin" and "repentance" are words one very rarely hears. What do they really mean? People speak of crimes, mistakes, faults, wrongdoing; but they rarely use the word *sin*. In fact, many people think that the word *sin* is old-fashioned and should not be used any more. This is not so, because the word *sin* has a meaning which none of the other words has. Repentance means being sorry for having committed sins and determining never to commit them again. If we want Yom Kippur to mean something in our lives, we must examine what *sin* and *repentance* used to mean in the past, and then see whether we cannot find out whether these two words have meaning for us today.

1. *What Did Our Ancestors
Consider Sinful?*

In times gone by, people used to believe that the various forces of nature, such as fire, water, rain, were controlled by various gods. Each had its own god. Now, people depended a great deal upon nature: they needed fire for warming themselves, and for cooking; they needed water to drink and to help raise the crops in the fields. It was necessary, therefore, that they should enjoy the benefits of these things; but they could not enjoy the benefits unless the gods who controlled water and fire were willing to allow them to. Thus, people felt that they must do nothing which would make the gods angry; and, furthermore, they must perform those ceremonies which they believed the gods wanted them to perform.

We are now in a position to understand what a *sin* was, according to them. A *sin* was committed when anyone failed to perform the proper kind of ceremony at the proper time, in the proper way. No wonder that people in those days were terribly afraid to commit a *sin*! It might mean losing a very precious and necessary thing, something which they depended upon in order to live. They believed that the gods punished sinners by depriving them of the things which the gods controlled: a *sin* against the rain god meant not having rain. Of course, sometimes sins were committed accidentally, and very often when rain did not come people thought that perhaps they had, without realizing it, committed a *sin*. Then they would pray and fast, thinking that the gods would have pity and forgive them.

Our ancestors thought of sin in this way too, at the beginning. For example, we read in the Bible that when the Israelites wandered in the desert after leaving Egypt, and before coming to Eretz Yisrael, they built a *mishkan*, or a kind of tent in which they believed God lived. There were many rules and regulations to be followed in this *mishkan*: for example, only the high priest was allowed to enter the innermost room where the tablets of the Law were kept, and before going in he had to bathe and put on certain clothes. They believed that if he failed to observe these ceremonies, he would die.

Thus, our ancestors thought of sin as disobeying certain rules and regulations. In fact, the very beginnings of Yom Kippur can be traced to the time when they decided that one day in the year should be set aside for the sole purpose of praying and bringing sacrifices in order to make up for any possible sins that any of the people might have made by mistake. In addition, they began the practice of fasting. In this way, they thought, they would show God how sorry they were for any sins that they might have committed, and God would forgive them. Prayer, sacrifice and fasting also showed that they would, as far as possible, never again commit sins. This was "repentance."

2. *How the Idea of Sin Gradually Changed*

The idea of sin which has just been described dates from a time when our ancestors did not differ greatly

from their neighbors in their idea of God. They thought of God as being only the invisible power behind the workings of nature, and they worshiped God only because they needed the things which they believed God would give them, things like rain and good crops and victory over their enemies. But later on a new idea developed. The people responsible for this new idea were known as the Prophets. They believed that God, who was the creator of the world and also the controller of rain, etc., was also interested—perhaps even more interested—in seeing that justice and peace triumphed. They believed that God wanted men and women to act toward one another with kindness and mercy, and that obedience to Him should take the form of doing good deeds.

According to the Prophets, therefore, sin was not just the failure to carry out certain ceremonies; sin was committing a wrong against a fellow man. It is true that the Prophets continued to think that these ceremonies (another word for ceremonies is "rites") were important, but not in the same way that the people before them believed. The Prophets thought that rites were only symbols, and that God was not angry when rites were neglected; He was angry when people acted unjustly. God was more pleased with people who were good people, and who may have neglected the rites, than with people who performed the rites—and acted unjustly.

An example might make this clear: Let us suppose that a man belongs to an organization devoted to fight-

ing intolerance. This organization, when it met, went through certain ceremonies, such as singing a particular song, or taking a certain pledge. Would it not be foolish, the Prophets would have said, to take the pledge and then go out and act in an intolerant way against people of a different race or religion? It is true that the members of the organization would consider reciting a pledge important, because in that way they showed the world what they stood for, and anyone who failed to perform the ceremonies would be breaking the rules. The ceremonies help to teach the idea of justice; but the real purpose of the organization would be to carry out this ideal, and the question to be asked of each member is: *Are you working for justice for all people?*

This was the message of the Prophets. For example, Isaiah said:

*"If on your fast day you pursue your own business,
And press on with all your labors;
If you fast for the sake of strife and contention,
And to smite with godless fist;
You fast not on such a day
As to make your voice heard on high.*

*Can such be the fast I choose—
A day for a man to humble himself,
To bow down his head like a bulrush,
To grovel in sackcloth and ashes?
Will you call this a fast,
A day of pleasure to the Lord?*

*Is not this the fast I choose—
To loose the bonds of wickedness,
To undo the knots of the yoke,
To let the oppressed go free,
And every yoke to snap?
Is it not to share your bread with the hungry . . .?"*

The Prophets said: fasting and sacrifices and prayer are important because they show what we stand for, but the important question is: *Are we working for justice and righteousness?* Thus the Prophets changed the idea of sin. And in accordance with the idea of the Prophets, the celebration of Yom Kippur received a new meaning. The Rabbis of old adopted the belief of the Prophets and taught that it was wrong to go through the motions of repenting (by fasting and prayer) unless one intended seriously to change one's ways. From that time on, sin came to mean *moral wrongdoing*.

3. *What Can "Sin" Mean Today?*

We have seen that the idea of sin changed in the course of history. First, it meant disobeying certain laws dealing with rites and ceremonies. Then it meant disobeying certain moral laws, like the command to do justice and to deal kindly with fellow men. But in our day even the second idea of sin leaves us unsatisfied. Why? Because, in the past, our ancestors thought that the Torah, which they believed was given by God to the

Jewish people, contained all the laws of justice that might ever be needed. They believed that if people lived up to the moral laws of the Bible, they were doing all that any human being might be expected to do.

But we discover today that we live in a very different kind of world from the world in which our ancestors lived. We have many problems which they did not have. For example, in olden times things were never made by machine. Today in almost every large city there are factories, and one of the problems we have to face is: what rights should the workers in the factory have? Should they have a right to ask for a share in the profits of the factory? Should they have the right to say who shall be given a job and who shouldn't? In other words, there are problems of justice which we must solve which *never existed in ancient times*. For that reason, it is impossible for us to find the answers to all our modern problems in our ancient Law, even if we made up our minds to obey all the moral laws contained in the Torah.

What, then, should the word "sin" mean to us today? What kind of act is there which we could describe as an act of disobedience to God? Since we do not any longer believe that the Torah contains all the moral laws that we need, is there any law which, if we disobeyed it, would be sin? We think there is. According to the ideas which we discussed in the earlier chapters, each human being has in him (or her) the power to remake the world, or to help remake the world into a beautiful, peaceful one. This power which we all have we call the "divine" in us, that is, the spark of

God in us. Every time we wish for the health and happiness of the whole world (and not for ourselves alone), every time we do an act of justice or perform a kindly deed, we are using that force in ourselves. Now, whenever we *fail to make use of that power*, whenever we act in a mean, selfish way, whenever we have a task to perform and are too lazy to perform it, whenever we hate our fellow men or act unjustly toward them, we are committing a sin.

The Best in us is the God in us. Is the meaning of that statement clear? If so, it should also be clear what a sin is: a sin is failing to be at our best. What then does repentance mean? Repentance means realizing that we have not been at our best, and determining to be at our best in the future. Sometimes we become better people after we have made mistakes. Our Rabbis of old used to say that "a repentant sinner" is more worthy than "the sinless." Why? Because one who has committed a sin sees for himself where that sin leads him. He understands from his own experience how wrong it is not to try to be at one's best.

Now we should be able to answer the question: "What can *sin* mean today?"

4. *Why Do We Fast on Yom Kippur?*

If all that we have said about sin and repentance is true, we may ask the question: why should we fast? If sin means failing to be at our best, and repentance means determining that we shall try always to be at our

best, why do we need to perform the ceremony of fasting? Have we not already pointed out that fasting, as a ceremony, cannot take the place of a sincere change of heart?

When we fast, we do without food for a whole day. Doing without food is not easy, because we become very hungry, and sometimes weak, and we desire to eat. Yet we control ourselves; and even if we are tempted to take just a little bite of something, we do not do so. *We control ourselves.*

Remember that rites are supposed to stand for ideas. What idea does fasting stand for? It stands for the idea of *self-control*. Why is it so necessary for us to emphasize self-control? Because we find that when we try to be at our best, we must very often do without some things which we might want very much, and which we cannot have if we really want to be at our best. In other words, part of the task of being at our best is the task of self-control.

For example, let us suppose that we enjoy going to the movies. One day, someone comes to us and asks us for a contribution to a fund which is being raised for the purpose of sending poor children to camp in the summertime. We have been planning all week to go to the movies, and we want very much to see the picture that is being shown. What shall we do? In a case of this kind, we have to exercise self-control, and do without the thing we want, that is, if we are trying to be at our best.

Thus, when we fast on Yom Kippur, we are doing

without food—which, of course, everybody likes and wants—and we do without the food to show ourselves how necessary it is at times to exercise self-control for the sake of a cause. We realize that the actual fasting does nobody else any good; and it does us no good unless we learn the lesson which it tries to teach us. But if we remember, when we fast, that fasting is a symbol, a sign of self-control, then it is doing something very worthwhile for us. In our efforts to be always at our best, we must sometimes do without good things; and fasting is our way of stating this truth and promising that if the time should ever come when we are called upon to sacrifice for a worthwhile cause, we shall be ready.

5. *How Important Is One Person?*

Sometimes people will say: "What difference does it make in this big world how I act? After all, I am only one individual. There are millions and millions of people in the world. What if I *am* sinful? Will that make a difference? Suppose I am honest; will that make any difference in the world, when there are thousands of dishonest people? What value is there in my working for peace or for justice? I am only one person." People who talk that way seem to forget the old motto: every little bit helps.

The world is made up of men and women, boys and girls. If one man in a hundred acts selfishly or unjustly, there is a danger that he may make his fellow men

do as he does. Sinfulness is catching. It spreads from one to another. When one person acts in the wrong way, he is not acting in that way all by himself. Others watch him, hear about him, and are likely to be influenced by him. In the long run, one wrong deed by one person can lead to many wrong deeds by many people.

It is important for us to remember, therefore, that being at one's best can also be catching. Since people follow the example of others, they may imitate good acts as well as bad ones. Therefore, each and every person should realize that he is responsible for his fellow men; we call this individual responsibility. It is a mistake to think that one's behavior has nothing to do with the behavior of others; each individual man and woman must be responsible for others, as well as for himself or herself.

On Yom Kippur in the special part of the service called *Abodah*, we show how important this idea of responsibility is. Why is it called *Abodah*? In ancient times, on Yom Kippur, the High Priest would perform a sacrifice of an animal, believing that this sacrifice would cleanse the Temple of all sins. The sins committed during the year might have been committed by any of the members of the Jewish people. The uncleanness of the Temple might have been due to this or that individual. The sacrifice showed that the whole Temple, which was the center of Jewish life, could be affected by the behavior of any one Jew. Today, in the synagogue, we read a description of that sacrifice and the ceremony, to remind us that each and every Jew can

make all of Jewish life sinful—and that each and every person can make our country or our city sinful. Thus, the *Abodah* on Yom Kippur is performed in order to emphasize the idea of "individual responsibility."

6. *How Can We Show Our Sense of Responsibility?*

If each and every person is so important in our efforts to remake the world, it is necessary for us to know how we can help, as individuals. We can help, first, by always keeping in mind the difference between what we see about us and what we should like to see. For example, when we see poor people, living in broken-down houses, without enough to eat, we should not merely feel sorry for them, or give them a few pennies to help them along. We should also keep in mind an ideal. What is that ideal? It is that there should come a time when no person, no matter what his religion or race, should be without a good job, when all should have enough to eat, when all should live in strong, clean, warm, well-lighted houses, when no one should have to worry about being in want in illness or old age, when all would be sure of getting a good education.

Secondly, we can help by always keeping in mind what has been said above about the effect of our actions upon others. Our Rabbis expressed this idea in a very poetic way. They said: "Every single person should say, 'The world was created for my sake.'" By this they meant that every person should realize that his

actions may influence other people, that behavior is catching, and that each person should plan his behavior with this in mind.

Lastly, we should always bear in mind that everything we have comes to us as a result of this one's or that one's work. For example, when we drink a glass of milk, do we ever stop to think how that glass of milk came to our table? Who took care of the cow, who milked the cow, who brought the milk to the dairy for pasteurizing, who filled the bottle, who carried the bottle to the train, who drove the train to the city, and who took the bottle of milk on to the wagon and delivered it to our house—do we ever consider how many individual men had a part in giving us our glass of milk? If we do stop to think about all this, we realize once again how important each person is. If any one in the whole chain had shirked his job, the milk would not have arrived.

Having thought about how much we owe to so many individuals, we are then in a position to plan our own behavior accordingly. That means that in our actions we will carry out our responsibilities in the same faithful way that all those people did who brought the milk to the table.

Very often we hear people giving all sorts of excuses for not carrying out their responsibilities. For example, the very first excuse which we mentioned, the one which says, "What difference does it make what I do? I am only one little person in a big world." We have tried to answer that excuse already. Another kind of

excuse runs as follows: "I can't help what I do. I was born that way." Have you ever heard people blaming their parents for their own laziness or dishonesty? It is a common way of shirking responsibility. People say that the kind of person one is, is a result of "heredity"; that is, one is born with certain traits of character, and one cannot ever overcome them. This is absolutely false, and we emphasize the idea of repentance in order to show that this idea is false. Repentance means that we *can* overcome our faults, whether they be inherited or they be only habits which we have developed. When a person is dishonest, and does not know that what he does is dishonest, he cannot really be blamed for doing what he does. But if a man is dishonest and knows that he is dishonest, he can correct himself. *As soon as we recognize our sins, we are in a position to avoid them in the future.*

One of the most important facts about responsibility, however, we have not yet mentioned, and that is: There are many people who feel that they ought to be responsible, *but they are responsible only to a small group.* That means, for example, that sometimes a man may be a very loving husband and father, and may do everything in his power to help and protect his family, but he may be dishonest in his dealings with strangers. Or, for example, a man may be responsible to his country, and be as patriotic as anyone can possibly be, but he may care nothing about anybody who lives in any other country. People are loyal to their friends, to their neighbors—but that is as far as their loyalty goes.

How can we make our sense of responsibility as broad as possible? How can we help ourselves to keep in mind that we ought to be loyal to the greatest number of people? We can do this by remembering that when we are at our best, we are making use of the force in us which we call God; that (as we have seen) *all* human beings have that force within them, and therefore *all* human beings are entitled to the kindness and consideration and justice which we show when we use that force which is in us. In this way, we will learn that we are brothers to all men, and that we must *act* like brothers to all men.

7. *How to Make Our Best Better*

We have seen that Yom Kippur stands for remaking ourselves, examining our way of living, criticizing it, determining to change. We have seen that sin means not being *at our best*; and we have seen what we should do to help ourselves to be *at our best*. One thing more remains to be learned: and that is, that our *best* changes as we grow older. By that we mean that, as we go along in life, we find that what is the right thing for us to do at one time is different from what the right thing to do is at another time.

For example, a young boy should be obedient and respectful to his parents. He should take his parents' advice when they give it, and he should remember that since they know much more than he does, he should do as they advise. At that particular stage in his life,

such behavior may be considered being at his best. But when he grows up and becomes a full-fledged man, being at his best must mean something altogether different. At this stage in his life, he should assume responsibilities; he should be able to make his own decisions; he should have a mind of his own. It is very wrong for a full-grown man to depend upon others to tell him what he has to do.

But not only must we learn to change our idea of what being at one's best is; we must always try to make our best better. That is, when we are doing what we think is our best, we may actually *not* be doing our best. We never realize how much better we can be. Sometimes in an emergency we discover how much more we have of courage, and kindness, and cooperation than we realized before. For example, most of us would not think very much about a stranger whom we saw walking along the street. Let us suppose, however, that suddenly that stranger should become sick. Immediately a crowd of people would gather, and every one would suddenly become very much interested in him. Someone would help him to a seat; another would run to call a doctor; a third would call a policeman to take charge. Now, this helpfulness would have been lying asleep in these people, so to speak, and would never have been awakened, if it had not been for the emergency.

Is it not strange that so much kindness and cooperation should go wasted—just because there *is* no emergency? Did Mr. A, who ran for the doctor, ever realize that he would actually ever become so helpful? He

probably surprised himself. Now, if instead of waiting for another emergency, he kept alive that spirit of helpfulness, he would be making his best even *better*. He would now realize that what he thought was his best was not his best at all, but only his next-best. One of the things which our schooling—in general schools and Jewish schools—ought to teach us is *how to make our best always better*.

There is always room for improvement, however, not only in ourselves but in everything. For example, we may live in a country where many people live quite comfortably, but where some live very poorly. There are some people who may say: "This is the best possible country." They think that by saying so they are being very patriotic; that they are standing up for their country. But they are making a mistake when they think that there is no room for improvement—or when they think that no improvement is possible. We all know the kind of people who say: "Let us do this in such-and-such a way; this was how our grandparents did it, this was how our parents did it, and that is how we should do it." They seem to forget that in all matters they should try to make their best even better.

If we keep in mind all that has been said about Yom Kippur, and we try in our synagogues to bring out the meaning of these thoughts, we will be making Yom Kippur what it deserves to be: one of the great holy days in our Jewish calendar.

SOME THOUGHTS ON CHAPTER III

1. We know that our ancestors gradually changed their idea of sin. This was a form of development, or "creation." Is there any connection between this development and the discussion (in the chapter on the Sabbath) on "God as Creator"? Try to put into your own language the thought that the evolution of religion is itself a good reason for believing in God.
2. "You've committed a sin," shouted the little boy as his big brother tore a piece of paper on the Sabbath. Do you consider that a sin? Is it in the same class with stealing? Is it like telling a lie? If not, what is the difference?
3. "It's a sin to waste food." "It's a sin for a girl like her, with such a voice, not to cultivate it." Is the use of the word "sin" in these statements just slang, or has the word a truly religious meaning?
4. There are some people who, on Yom Kippur, go home for several hours and take a nap. They say that in this way they can forget how hungry they are. What is basically wrong with their reasoning?
5. Choose five objects in your home, or in school, and on a large piece of paper draw a sort of graph showing the various people who had a share in bringing those objects to where they are now. Should you be grateful to them all for making the object and bringing it to you, or do you think they

should be grateful to you for buying it? Or both? Perhaps neither? Give your reasons.

6. "Rationalization" means: *finding excuses* for doing what you know you really shouldn't do. It involves the use of "reason." Does it follow, therefore, that people should avoid using their "reason" ("Theirs not to reason why; theirs but to do and die!")? What *does* follow from the fact that people use their reason falsely is that we must be careful how we do use our reason. Can you give examples of "good" and "bad" reasoning?
7. In ancient times, our ancestors brought sacrifices to the Temple. Later, after the Temple was destroyed, this was changed and prayers were substituted for the sacrifices. Do you think the change was completely good? Do prayers take the place of sacrifices? How much does it cost to pray? Do you think that praying ought to cost something? Explain.
8. They say that war brings out many qualities in people which they hardly suspect are in them. Can you name some? Is this a good argument for having wars?
9. Should one say: "I am a Republican (Democrat or anything else) because my grandfather was one"? Should one say: "My grandfather was a Republican (Democrat or anything else), therefore I shall take the opposite side"? Do you have to agree with your grandfather in order to respect him?

THE PILGRIMAGE FESTIVALS THAT DEAL WITH HISTORY AND NATURE

1. *How the Jews Taught the Nations the Value of History*

WHEN WE READ OR HEAR about events in the past, we call that *history*. Everyone who goes to school today studies history. But there was a time when people did not study history in the same way that we do. How do we study history? We study events in the past not merely to know what happened; it is not just a matter of satisfying our curiosity. We study history because we feel that we have something *to learn* from the lives of our ancestors. They had many different kinds of experiences: they lived through peace times and war times, they traveled and they had governments. When we read history, we find that we are living through many ages in addition to our own age. If we study history carefully, we can actually live through thousands of years. Our actual lifetime is quite short; perhaps sixty or seventy years. But the study of history makes our lives very long, beginning from early times and going down to our own times.

Now, in olden days, practically nobody studied history in order to learn from it. In fact, the Jewish peo-

ple was the first people to study history in this way. The ancient Greeks, and perhaps one or two other peoples, had books written by great poets in which they could read the story of their nation. But they read these stories only because these stories told of the heroes of the nation and of the great deeds of heroism which those men performed. In this way, the members of those nations learned to be proud of their people. But the Jews wrote their history, and studied their history, because they felt that to know their history was to learn *how to be at their best*, how to live a moral life. Jews have always felt that the story of their nation had a lesson to teach, and in this sense the Jews differed from other nations in the way they studied their history.

As a matter of fact, most of the modern European nations paid little attention to their own histories until about one hundred years ago. The child living in France did not learn French history at school; he learned the history of the early Hebrews. The English child, too, did not learn about the history of England, but about Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and the other men and women in Jewish history. Why? Because, until recently (about one hundred years ago) the education of children in Europe was in the hands of religious teachers—Christian teachers—and the Christian Church took care of all education. Why were these children taught Jewish history instead of their own history? Because their teachers found in Jewish history important lessons which they wanted the children to learn; the history of England and France had not

yet been written in such a way as to help the children live a moral life. Later on, however, these nations began to realize how valuable the study of history was, and then they began to teach their children their own history.

But the Jewish people was responsible for making the other nations realize how valuable the study of history was for teaching children how to *be at their best*.

2. *Jewish History and the Idea of God*

How did it come about that the Jews, after living in so many different countries, continued to think of their history as one continuous story? Other nations remembered something of their past, so long as they remained living in the same land, but as soon as they traveled to another land they forgot about their own past and studied the history of the people among whom they lived. This was because they believed that their gods ruled over one particular country, and had no power over any other country. Therefore, when the people moved away, they believed that they were then living under the rule of another god.

Our ancestors, however, believed that no matter where they were *they were still living under the rule of their own God*, because for them God was the ruler of the whole world. Thus, when Abraham lived in Eretz Yisrael, the God of Abraham had to be obeyed. When the Israelites were in Egypt and later, when they

wandered in the desert, the same God ruled over them and demanded that they obey Him. When the Israelites came to their land, again He was their God. And later, when the Jews were exiled from their land, and scattered to all parts of the world, they still worshiped the same God. Thus, no matter where Jews lived, or how often they changed their lands, the same God ruled over them. For that reason, their long history was considered all part of one continuous story.

How did this happen? Other nations believed that their gods were the powers that gave them food and shelter and protection from enemies. Since they believed that their gods were responsible for the food and shelter and protection of *one particular country*, they could not imagine those same gods having any power over the food, for example, of another country. But the Jews thought of God as that Being who demanded that people should live in accordance with the laws of justice and mercy; justice and mercy are not limited to any one place. One can—and should—be just and merciful everywhere that one may be. Therefore, *the God of justice and mercy* rules all over the world; and the Jews, who believed that they possessed the Torah of God, based on justice and mercy, believed also that no matter where they lived, that Torah had to be obeyed, and that their God was God of the entire world.

For this reason, the many travels and wanderings of the Jews were thought of as being all part of one history; and that is why Jewish history, although it covers

many lands, is remembered by Jews as one continuous story.

3. *The Festivals of the Changing Seasons*

The three Festivals which we shall study are Pesah, Shabuot and Sukkot. On these three holidays, in ancient times, the Jews would gather at Jerusalem from all parts of Eretz Yisrael. There, in the Temple, they would offer sacrifices and celebrate the holiday. For this reason they are called the Pilgrimage Festivals; that is to say, the people made a "pilgrimage," or a journey, to Jerusalem on those days.

Each of these holidays deals with Jewish history. On each of these holidays, we remember some part of Jewish history, and by remembering it try to learn an important lesson for our own lives. What these lessons are, we shall see in the chapters that follow. But at this time it is necessary to point out that these three Festivals deal not only with history, but with nature. That means that these holidays are set aside not only to recall events in the past, but also to celebrate important days in the seasons of the year. For example, Pesah is a spring festival. The end of winter and the coming of spring bring the beginnings of the harvest; flowers, fruits and grains begin to appear in the spring. The Jewish people has always felt that it is necessary to take notice of the changing seasons—also in order to learn important lessons for living at one's best. The

Jews have always seen in the regular workings of the seasons, as well as in the history of the nation, the workings of that power in the world which we call God.

What is the lesson which we should learn from nature? It is this: that we should not be satisfied merely with trying to get the most out of the soil. We should not be interested only in trying to develop the richest crops. *We should learn also to make the best use of what we get from the soil.* We have a responsibility to be at our best in seeing to it that every human being has enough to eat and enough to wear, and a proper home to live in.

In very ancient times, as we have seen, people believed that worshipping the gods was a way of getting them to provide people with what they needed. Men thought that religion was just a way of getting food, preventing disease from attacking them, and keeping enemies away. As a matter of fact, there are many people today who still think that religion is useful only for these things. On the other hand, many men and women today refuse to have anything to do with religion because they have been taught that religion and worship and belief in God have to do with getting food and shelter. These people say: science has taught us how to get the best crops from the soil, and how to prevent disease. Religion, they say, is only "superstition"; that means, accepting false beliefs, beliefs which are foolish and which a person with intelligence would not accept.

For this reason, many people think that, as men and

women become more intelligent, religion will die out. But that is not so, because, according to the teachings of our ancestors, religion is not supposed to teach us how to get the things we need, but *how to use those things* in accordance with justice and mercy, once we *have* gotten them.

How can we learn to use the gifts of nature properly? This is where history comes in: when we study how people lived in the past, and when we learn what happened to them as a result of how they used the gifts of nature, then we are in a position to learn a valuable lesson. If, for example, we discover that in ancient times certain individuals became greedy and kept for themselves all that they could take, and if we learn that, as a result, there was war and hatred and unhappiness—can we not then learn an important lesson?

These three Festivals, therefore, by combining a study of history with a celebration of the new seasons, can be extremely helpful to us.

4. *Festivals Are for Rejoicing*

The emphasis which these three Festivals give to nature has another important value. In some countries, and in certain religions, people are taught that to be spiritual one must not enjoy oneself too much. What is meant by spiritual? According to these religions, to be spiritual means to do without pleasures, and, in fact, to eat and drink as little as possible, to give no thought to fine clothes, or entertainments. To be spiritual, ac-

According to this idea, is not to have fun, not to be jolly and gay, not to give in to appetites. As a result of this way of thinking, men used to become ascetics; this means, they used to eat only just enough to stay alive, to wear very simple rough clothing, even to torture themselves by lying on beds of nails and wearing shirts that tore their skin.

According to our ancestors, being spiritual meant nothing like this. They believed in enjoying life. They could see no reason why people should not eat and drink, and dance, and sing, and have a good time. Our people saw in the gifts of nature the gifts of God to man, which he could use to make his life happy. That is why, on Pesah, we rejoice in the first harvest of the year, and why on Shabuot we celebrate the first fruits of the year, and why on Sukkot we celebrate the final harvest. Our ancestors told us to be glad and to rejoice.

But, they said, these blessings bring with them a responsibility. They do not belong to any one person or any one family; they are intended for *all* the members of the human family. They should not be used only to give *us* pleasure; they are to be shared by all, so that no one may go hungry, or thirsty, or naked.

SOME THOUGHTS ON CHAPTER IV

1. Some say: History repeats itself. Others say: History never repeats itself. Which is true? Can they both be true? Give some examples of the way

in which a knowledge of history could help people live at their best.

2. Jewish history is quite different from the history of other peoples. What would you say was the basic difference? In what sense is it true that without their religion the Jews might never have been able to continue as a people?
3. Science teaches us how to make things, how to fly, how to deal with the human body. Does it teach us *what* things to make, what to drop from airplanes (bombs or food), whether to cure the body or to kill it? Discuss this question as it relates to the ever-present problem: religion and science.
4. You frequently hear that Judaism is a solemn religion. Is that true? Figure out how many happy holidays there are, how many solemn ones.
5. Discuss the expression: "Living the life of the spirit." Does this mean being a ghost? What does it mean to say: "He has a soul"? Is there a necessary conflict between body and soul?


SUKKOT:***SYMBOL OF COOPERATION***

SUKKOT, or the Festival of Tabernacles, which is the first of these three Festivals which we shall study, was originally the only one. It was known as "The Festival." On that occasion, the Israelites would leave their homes and gather at one central place of worship, and there they would rejoice and celebrate the harvest. The holiday lasted seven days, and during that week all the people would live in little huts, known as *sukkot*. The reason for doing this is stated in the Bible as follows: "that your children may know that I made the Israelites dwell in huts, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt..." Thus, in order to remember the time when the first of the Israelites wandered in the desert and had to live in small, wooden booths, Jews ever after were told to do the same thing on Sukkot.

What was the purpose of repeating for one week what the early Israelites did in the desert? According to the great Jewish philosopher, Maimonides, the reason is that living in a little hut reminds us who live in fine houses that we should be grateful and happy for the comforts of our homes, and that we should therefore not grow proud and selfish. According to another teacher, living in the *sukkah* should remind us that we

should not put our trust in things that are strong or in people who are rich; but that we should realize that one can be good and at one's best even in a little hut that is weak and frail.

On Sukkot, in addition to setting up the little booths, we also perform a ceremony with a *lulav* (palm branch) and *etrog* (citron). This ceremony comes down to us from the days when our ancestors lived in Eretz Yisrael and used to form a procession in the Temple, carrying these plants. The question we should ask ourselves is: how can we make the Festival of Sukkot, with its many ceremonies, have meaning for us, help us to learn important lessons?

1. *What Sukkot Originally Meant*

One thing is clear to us when we try to understand the original meaning of Sukkot, and that is that the holiday was intended to remind our ancestors of their desert days. Our ancestors must have found something worth remembering in the way *their* ancestors lived in the desert. Otherwise, why should they have insisted upon living in huts for one week each year?

If this was so, we must ask: what was there about the way people lived in the desert which was important to keep in mind? The answer is: according to the history of the Israelites, the period of the wandering in the desert was the period when they were *at their best*. It was then, they believed, that they had agreed to the covenant with the God of Israel, when they lived an ideal

life. Their life in the desert seemed to them to have been much better than the life they lived in Eretz Yisrael.

The life in the desert was better because, as wandering tribes, they were all equal; there were no rich men and poor men; there were no higher classes and lower classes. In fact, our ancestors believed that "the good old days," when the original Israelites were shepherds, were really the happiest days. They thought of Abraham as being a shepherd; they thought of Moses and David too as having been shepherds. And on Sukkot they built themselves little huts to live in, as though to say: "Let us go back to the wilderness, to the kind of life our ancestors used to live; let us once again make the ideals of the desert life our ideals." Thus, the *sukkah* was a symbol or a sign of their being dissatisfied with the kind of life they lived all year.

The *lulav* was supposed to be a sign of nature's gifts. It was a sign of the fruits and grains and flowers that came from the earth. And the combination of the *sukkah* and the *lulav* was supposed to tell this story: "When we lived in the desert, we all shared equally everything that we had. We were all friendly, because in the desert there was always danger of attack, and we depended upon one another to fight off attackers. This equality and this friendliness made it possible for us to enjoy the gifts of nature. When there is inequality and unfriendliness, even those who have enough to eat and to drink cannot be happy; and certainly, those who do not have enough are unhappy."

The *sukkah* and the *lulav* should therefore be for us

a symbol, a sign that we are determined to bring about that freedom and equality which our distant ancestors enjoyed when they lived in the desert, and had to make their homes out of little huts.

2. Human Rights Are Sacred

From the description of what Sukkot originally meant, and from what we have said about the meaning of Sukkot for our day, it should be clear that according to Jewish religion each human being has certain rights. And if we criticize the world as we find it today, it must be because we believe that people are not receiving what they are entitled to. Yet we might hear someone say: "Is it true that human beings, simply because they happen to live on this earth, automatically are entitled to certain things? Is it not rather true that human beings are just like animals, and that if you want something, you have to fight for it? Is it not true that one must be strong enough to get food and shelter and clothing, and that otherwise one has to do without these things? Isn't it true that might makes right?"

The answer is: it may be true that today, as things are, the strong can often win out, while the weak lose. It is true that, at the present time, many people do not pay any attention to the rights of others. But that does not mean that human beings are not entitled to those rights; on the contrary, it may very well be that *the world today is troubled, and nations are always ready to go to war against one another, and so many people in*

many lands are without enough to eat simply as a result of the fact that human beings do not enjoy the rights they are entitled to.

We have shown in an earlier chapter how dependent we are upon one another. No one of us could get along by himself; we would be without food and milk and clothing if it were not for the people who bring us these things. And they, in turn, would not be able to live either unless they had those jobs, and could earn a living. We are all members of one family, the family of human beings, and unless we realize that each one of us has a right to an equal share of things, we will *all* be without those things. For example, when a man works in a factory, he is entitled to a decent wage. Why? Because if he does not earn enough, he will not be able to buy clothes. If he cannot buy clothes, then the man who works in the clothing factory will lose his job—since there will be nothing for him to do. If he loses his job, then he cannot afford to buy milk, and the man who works for a dairy company will lose his job. And so it goes on. Once we deprive a person of his rights, many other people at once lose their rights.

Jewish religion expressed this idea in a very poetic way. The question once came up: which is the most important idea in the whole Torah? One Rabbi, Ben Azzai, said, "It is this: that Man was created in the image of God." He did not mean that Man looks like God; he meant that each and every human being has within him the force which makes him different from the animals. Each human being is just as important as

every other human being. We are all *created equal*. This means that we are all entitled to the same rights. We have seen how necessary it is for us to remember this idea. If we forget it, there is trouble. Does this not make those rights *sacred?*—all-important? (Remember how we defined "sacred.")

3. *What Does Equality Mean?*

If we are all entitled to the same rights, it is necessary for us to know exactly what those rights are. When we speak of *equality*, we might imagine that it means that all human beings are supposed to act in exactly the same way, and live in exactly the same way, and perhaps even talk and think alike. This is a mistake. Equality means: we are all of us entitled to the rights which are very well expressed in the Declaration of Independence. They are: "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

What do we mean by life? It means more than just the right to live, that is, the right to be protected from a criminal who wishes to kill us. To live means to be able to earn a *living*. Every human being has a right to work, to a job. There was a time when people used to think (and many people still do) that the community or the government had nothing to do with this problem. That is not correct. When a person is born and brought up in a country, the people of that country have a responsibility to him. They must see to it that he has an opportunity of earning his living, if he is well and

strong, and can work. Certainly, if he is sick, he must be taken care of.

But it is not enough to give a man a job. He is entitled to do the kind of work for which he is best fitted. A man who could be a great musician would not be enjoying his rights to "live" if he were forced to take a job digging ditches; and a person who was very much interested in science, and was good at it, would not be enjoying his rights if he were compelled to work as a business man. Such people would be unhappy at their work, and their lives would be miserable. Of course, they would be eating and sleeping and living in a house; but they would not consider life worth living; they would be very sad. In addition, the community would be losing the services of a fine musician or a fine scientist—and that is a waste, to have them working at something they do not enjoy, and which they are not good at.

The right to life, therefore, means the right to earn a living at the occupation which will bring out the *best* in a person.

The second right is: liberty. Liberty does not mean permitting a person to do anything he wishes. Certainly, the rights of others would be destroyed if we permitted a strong man to take food away from a weak man—and did not interfere. No, liberty means something altogether different. It means the right to be *at one's best*. Do we have liberty today? Not in that sense, because today we are not *free* to be at our best. We are forced to do things which we know are wrong, but which we cannot help. For example, many men are not free to

be honest, either in business, or in professions, or in politics. The honest business man is often compelled, in order to save himself from ruin, to do dishonest things which he dislikes doing, simply because he would not be able to compete against his neighbors otherwise. A doctor or a lawyer is often forced to tell lies or commit other wrong acts just because he might lose his patient or his client if he refused.

Today, many people are not free to help their neighbors. They are forced to be selfish; they are selfish because they know that if they do not take care of themselves, no one else will take care of them. They must look after their own welfare first and foremost, and cannot afford to be helpful to others. *They are not at liberty* to be at their best.

The third right is: pursuit of happiness. Now, this third right might seem to be unnecessary to mention. Certainly, one might say, no one can stop us from trying to be happy. What does this mean? It means that happiness is more than merely making a living, or working at the job we like best, or being honest. Happiness means having an opportunity to satisfy our cultural desires. This means: every person should have a chance to learn how to enjoy music and art and good books. These are the things we do in our spare time. Each human being has a right to have spare time, and a right to be able to spend that spare time with cultural things. Today, even those who make a living have to work so hard and so long that all they have the energy to do when they come home is to go to sleep. Or,

if they still have energy left to enjoy themselves, they find that they cannot afford these enjoyments; they have just enough money for the necessities, like food and shelter.

The pursuit of happiness means, therefore, the right to educate oneself, and to enjoy the "finer things in life." But, as we said before, this does not mean that all people should get the same wages, and live in the same kind of houses. These rights every person should enjoy; but each person should receive as his reward as much as his services to the community are worth. It should be clear that the community must certainly place a higher value upon the services of an engineer than upon those of a man whose job it is to pick up papers in the park. No one would ever say that a skilled doctor should get only as much as a bus driver. Equality means that the bus driver has as *much right to a bus-driving job, with its rewards, as a doctor has to his job, with its rewards*. It means that every young boy and girl has an equal right to make the most of himself or herself; and if we discover that a young boy has a talent for medicine, he should be given a chance to study medicine. If a young girl shows ability in dressmaking, she should be given a chance to learn that trade. This is what equality means today.

4. *Why Equality Is Possible Today*

The Prophets who lived in Eretz Yisrael many centuries ago were the first men to preach equality. They saw

about them a few rich people who had more than enough, and a large number of poor people who had little or nothing. This, the Prophets believed, was absolutely wrong, and they criticized that situation. But, in spite of all their preaching, they never did succeed in changing the situation very much. Why did they fail? First, because the rich people, who were very powerful, tried always to stop them, and sometimes succeeded in having the Prophets driven away or punished.

But a second and more important reason was that in those days there was not enough food and land and other necessary things to go around. People had not yet learned how to make things by machinery, and they did not yet know how to work the soil in a scientific way. As a result, there was always a struggle going on as to who should have what little there was. And in this struggle, the strong would always defeat the weak.

The rule of the strong over the weak has continued down to our own day. In a war, the strongest would conquer land, and make all the people his slaves. They would work for him, and he would pay them what he thought they ought to receive. The workers never had any say in the matter; and if the owner decided that he did not want or need the products of the soil (if he had enough to live on from another field, for example) he would discharge the workers and would not care what became of them.

Sometimes a farmer might own a small tract of land and live on it peacefully. But then a famine would come,

and the poor farmer would find himself in a very difficult situation, so that he had to borrow money from the rich farmer. In order to be sure that he would get his money back, the rich farmer would make the poor farmer promise that unless the money were returned, the poor farmer would give his farm to the rich farmer. And, very often, the poor farmer would not be able to return the money—and the rich farmer would take his farm away from him. Thus the rich would get richer, and the poor would get poorer.

Later on, when machinery was invented and people began to make articles in factories, the rich man would build a factory and employ men to work for him. The rich man would pay the worker his wages, and after selling the product, he would be left with a profit. Now, as long as he could sell his product for a profit, he would continue to employ the worker. But if anything happened so that he could no longer sell his product for a profit, he would discharge the worker, and not care what became of him. He would not feel any responsibility for the worker, who might perhaps starve, together with his family, as a result of not having a job.

The difference between ancient times and later times is this: before machinery was invented, there was not enough to go around; but later, when shoes, for example, could be made by machine, enough shoes could be produced to supply every single person with shoes. This is the situation today, and therefore today there is absolutely no excuse for having anyone going about without shoes. When there is enough for everybody, we

should be able to bring about equality—as we have defined it.

In a system based on equality, the hope of the ancient Prophets would come true. They expressed their hope in this way: "And they shall build houses and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards and eat the fruit of them. They shall *not* build and another inhabit; they shall *not* plant and another eat."

5. *What Is Meant by Happiness?*

The Festival of Sukkot is known as "the season of our rejoicing." It is true that our ancestors wanted us to be happy and gay on all the festivals; but somehow they felt that on Sukkot we should be happier than ever. In fact, they believed that the Festival of Sukkot should be *dedicated* to the idea of happiness. And many of the celebrations that took place at Sukkot time, described for us in the Mishnah, show us how our ancestors rejoiced on this holiday.

We might very well ask the question: what do we mean by happiness? We did touch upon this subject in an earlier section of this chapter, but now we ought to spend a little more time in studying it more carefully. For, after all, the ambition of every person is to be happy, and if we can discover what true happiness is, we shall be doing a real service to ourselves.

Our ancestors used to say that when a man was happy, God's presence was with him. This was their

way of saying that we realize that God is in the world when we are happy. When we say that God is in the world, we mean that life is worthwhile, life is good, life is satisfying, life is worth living. We are glad to be alive. When do we feel that way? Some people make the mistake of thinking that they are happy when they are enjoying themselves. If they enjoy eating, they think they are happy when they eat. If they enjoy drinking, they think they are happy when they drink.

This is not so, because we very often find that even when we are enjoying certain pleasures, we feel unhappy at the same time. For example, if a boy is on his way to a football game (which he enjoys very much), and on the street he sees a very poor man shivering in the cold, that boy cannot be altogether happy during the game, because the chances are that he might think about that poor man. Thinking about that man can spoil his fun. Or let us say that this boy has homework to do, and someone invites him to go skating. He will not enjoy the skating altogether because from time to time he will be reminded of the fact that he really ought to be doing his homework—and his enjoyment will be spoiled.

Now, what is actually happening in these cases? Just this: there is a conflict or a struggle going on within him; he feels he ought to be doing his work. As long as there is such a struggle going on, one cannot be completely happy. To be happy, one must be able to enjoy pleasures without having anything to spoil them. When a boy has done his work, and really deserves a little

vacation, then he can enjoy his pleasures without having his conscience bother him. Or, if he has properly shared what he has with those who are in need, then when he spends money on his own pleasures, he can really enjoy them.

It is true that people will never be completely happy so long as there are others in the world who are poor and neglected. Many, many years may have to go by before we have learned how to provide every person with what he needs. But, in the meantime, the greatest happiness that we can get for ourselves can come only through *working toward the goal of a perfect world*. Even though we might not be able to bring about that perfect world, just *trying* to do so can bring us happiness. Selfishness will never make us happy.

6. *Gaining Happiness Through Cooperation*

Many young people today have surely heard their parents or elders remark from time to time that people used to be happier than they are these days. It is true that sometimes we look back upon the days that are gone and imagine that they were better in every way. This is a habit which most people have, of thinking of "the good old days" as so much better than the present time. They generally picture the "Golden Age" as being sometime in the dim past.

But, in spite of this habit, many students of history

tell us that, indeed, there is more unhappiness today than ever before. Years ago men seemed so much more satisfied with the little that they had; today those who have little want much, and those who have much want more. No one seems to be contented and satisfied. What are the reasons for this situation?

The reasons are, for the most part, these: People today are brought up to admire the so-called *successful* men and women. Who are the successful ones? The people who have made large fortunes, in politics or in their businesses. In other words, we are taught that the people we ought to try to imitate are the ones who have spent their lives achieving power and social position for *themselves*. We are given books to read, when we are young, describing the career of an "ambitious" young man who rises from bootblack to bank president. The citizens whose lives we are asked to study are the ones who usually have been wealthy and "successful." The heroes are those who have beaten down all their competitors and have won the prizes of success.

Our ancestors long ago disagreed with such opinions. They always taught that the humble and the quiet men were better than the strong and the proud. The greatest hero in the Bible, Moses, is described as having been "very meek, more than any man on the face of the earth." Meek means soft, gentle, mild, forgiving others, not thinking oneself too important. In the writings of our Rabbis, the man who looks for power and for the chance to rule over his neighbors is considered a wicked man.

Why did our ancestors object to a man's seeking

power? Because they realized that in doing so a man cannot possibly be happy. If he works all his life toward controlling the lives of others, beating down those who compete with him, he naturally cannot be friendly with those people. He regards them as enemies. He always feels that a battle is going on between him and the rest of the world. Certainly, if life is one long battle, it cannot bring us happiness.

The way we live at the present time cannot, therefore, make for happiness. We must always act toward our neighbors as though they were about to rob us of what we have. And, as a result of this constant fear and distrust and suspicion of one another, most of us are constantly worried about our jobs, and about not having enough to live on when we are old and unable to work.

As long as we struggle against one another and compete with one another, we cannot take our minds off the struggle. We have no time to relax. And when fathers come home from their work they are either so tired or so worried that they do not care about playing with their children, and do not give thought to being gay and happy with Mother. Family life becomes very sad—and all because of this terrible war that rages between man and man.

When we turn to Jewish life, we find again, that most men are not interested simply because they are too tired and too worried. They cannot take time off to go to the synagogue, or to take part in celebrations. They work on Sabbath and on holidays, for fear that

if they stop working their competitors will get ahead of them. Our ancestors believed that people would be much happier if, instead of competing against one another, they *cooperated* with one another.

Why does a father love his family? Because he does not compete with them; he shares what he has with them. That is why he can be happy with them. The Rabbis said, "Who is rich? He who is happy with his portion." This means that when one is satisfied with what one has and does not always try to get more and more and more, one can be happy. Instead of always measuring ourselves against others, and being jealous of those who have more than we, we should try to get only what we need and stop feeling bad that others have more.

We must learn to cooperate in all walks of life. But, most especially, we must try to change our way of life so that people will cooperate, rather than compete. The problem is a very big one, and not very easy to solve. But it is so important a problem that, unless we solve it, we shall not be able to make ourselves happy.

So on Sukkot, when we wave the *lulav* with the leaves of myrtle and willow, we should keep in mind the ancient lesson which our Rabbis taught. They said that each of these plants is a symbol of a different type of person. Only when we bind all the different plants together into one *united* bundle will God's blessing come to us. This was their way of saying that only through cooperation can we achieve happiness.

SOME THOUGHTS ON CHAPTER V

1. When you live with people at school, or when camping out together, you really get to know them. You learn what they consider important and unimportant; you discover, in other words, their "sense of values." What does that mean?
2. They say that artists and musicians do their best work when they are poor and unsuccessful, and that, when they are rich and famous, they are more likely to do poorer work. Is that always true? Sometimes? Never?
3. The Rabbis of old said: "A single man (Adam) was created for the sake of peace among mankind, that none should say to his fellow, 'My father was greater than your father.'" Explain this statement of the Rabbis and relate it to the idea that man is created in God's image.
4. Explain: Equality means the right of every person to have the opportunity to make the most of his life.
5. Do you know of any instances in which people found that being honest was a luxury, and cost more than they could afford? Are those people really free? Why?
6. It is frequently said that Jews in America at the present time cannot solve their problems by "assimilating," that is, by dropping their Judaism. The reason given is that, whether they are interested in Judaism or not, they are still regarded as Jews by

the non-Jews. Do you believe that *freedom* ought to include the freedom to cease being Jews (if they so wish)?

7. If Jews cannot be completely happy unless they are living a Jewish life, would they, therefore, be entitled to say that, as American citizens, they have the right to live as Jews, since the Constitution guarantees the right to the "pursuit of happiness"? How would this reasoning affect other religions?
8. "Thou openest Thine hand and satisfied every living thing with favor." This is quoted from the Psalms. Is it true? Is everyone satisfied; does everyone have enough to eat? If not, whose fault is it? Did not God provide enough?
9. There is a real difference between happiness and pleasure. What is that difference? Is it possible to be happy without ever having ice cream?
10. Review in your mind ten of the greatest heroes in Jewish history. See how many of them were warriors; how many scholars; how many great politicians. Can you come to any conclusions about the kind of heroes our ancestors honored? What would you say this tells us about our ancestors?

SHEMINI AZERET:

SYMBOL OF PRAYER

WHEN THE SEVEN DAYS of Sukkot are over, our Jewish calendar calls for the celebration of an eighth day, known as Shemini Azeret, the Eighth Day of Assembly. In the Bible, this day is described as being dedicated to coming together for "solemn assembly"; but we are not told exactly why this day was observed. Later on, the Rabbis, in their poetic way, tried to explain the origin of this day as follows: The Jewish people, beginning on Rosh Ha-Shanah and continuing right through Yom Kippur and Sukkot, spend many hours in the synagogue praying to God, and God is pleased to have them so close to Him. When the time comes for them to leave their holiday season, God begins to get lonesome for them, and begs them to stay just one more day. This extra day, they said, was Shemini Azeret.

Of course, this was a poetic way of saying that the Jews themselves were unhappy about the fact that the holiday season was over. It was *they* who were going to be lonesome. The question we must ask ourselves now is: What meaning can Shemini Azeret have for us? Can we find in this day some important idea which will help us to live at our best?

1. *The Importance of Praying Together*

We have said a good deal about what it means to believe in God, about the various ideas and ideals which we hold dear, and which we believe in. Throughout the whole discussion, we have been talking about the Force in us which enables us to do what is best for our fellow men and for ourselves. We have pointed out that when we make use of that Force in us we make use of the Godliness in us. There are many people, however, who say: "We accept the ideals which have been mentioned; we try our best to live up to them; we hope to see them come true—but we are not religious. We have no interest in the whole discussion about 'God.'"

There are, for example, some who call themselves "Ethical Culturists." That is, they believe that they ought to *cultivate*, to develop *ethics*, or morals. They would agree with most of the ideas contained in this book, but they would not say that these ideas have anything to do with God. They feel that it is enough to accept the ideals of justice, peace and freedom, and to work for those ideals. It is not necessary, they say, to call by the name "God" this Power within us which helps us to be at our best.

Are they right? Is it enough merely to seek for the good, and do good? Is it true that *ethics* gives us all the guidance we need, and that God and religion are unnecessary? We do not think so, and the reason is: we might know what is right and what is wrong; we might agree that people ought to go out and fight for the

right—and yet we might not have just that *emotional* power to make us go forward. Let us explain "emotional": this means the inner feeling of excitement, the enthusiasm, the right kind of spirit. For example, there are certain things in life which are not exactly logical, which we do not understand with our minds or our reason, but which, as we say, our *hearts* or feelings tell us. When we love a person, that love is not the result of our logic or our reasoning.

We may love someone who has many faults—and yet, if our love is strong, we pay little attention to these faults. If we were to use only our logic, we would look for someone who did not have these faults, and love that person. But we do not act that way. We are often guided by our *emotions*, our feelings. In the same way, we are led to act in certain ways sometimes not out of reason alone but because we feel very strongly about certain things. Thus, for example, we might all accept the idea that good houses should be provided for all families. We might be convinced in our minds about that fact. But we might not do anything to help bring about good housing. Why? Would it be because we did not believe in the ideal? No. It would be because we have not been driven to action by our feelings, our emotions. We would go about expecting that, somehow or other, somebody would do something about the problem. Let us suppose, however, that we attended a rally, and listened to stirring speeches about housing. Would we not be more likely, after the meeting was over, to go out and do a great many things about it? In the same way, we might

accept other ideals, like equality, freedom, democracy, and so on. These ideals might appeal to our reason—but unless we are emotionally excited by them, we are likely to do nothing.

That is why prayer is so necessary. We are not now speaking of praying by oneself. Very often, when we are alone, we like to pray, and to think about our lives, and our hopes. Here we are talking, however, about public prayer, prayer in which many people together declare their allegiance to peace and freedom and justice. Prayer is necessary because it gives us that extra bit of *drive*; it makes us want to go out and accomplish what we are striving for. When a large number of people—let us say, five hundred people—come together in the synagogue and pray for peace, and pray sincerely, thoughts like the following must run through their minds:

“Here are hundreds of men and women like myself. They are praying for peace. They all have the same idea that I have. They hate war. So do I. They are my brothers. Hundreds of us, with one heart and one mind, are pledging allegiance to this ideal. We will win out in the end. We must win out. We will change the world and make the world give up the madness of war. *God is with us.* That Force in each and every one of us is on the march. It will inspire us. It will drive us on to oppose war.”

Is it not clear that praying this way, with many others, helps us in our determination to accomplish our goals? It should, and it very often does. But it does

more than that: it makes us feel that we are not alone in our desire for peace. Many times people have good ideas, and believe in them. But after a while, they begin to lose their faith in those ideals because they are surrounded by people who make fun of those ideals. When they look about them and see that everyone says “No,” and they are the only ones who say “Yes”, they begin to think that perhaps they are wrong and the rest of the world is right. But when someone believes in peace, and finds himself surrounded by five hundred people who agree with him, he is encouraged. He takes heart, and all the difficulties which he saw before him now seem to be very small. A few drops of water cannot turn a wheel in a mill, but a rushing stream can. Thus, one person may think that he cannot accomplish anything, but when he finds himself with hundreds of others, he gains courage and hope. *Together they will turn the wheel.*

2. *Prayer the Enemy of Selfishness*

Most people are very much taken up with their own affairs. They have their livelihood to make, and they have their personal problems to solve. This is not to say anything against these people. It is perfectly natural to think about oneself. A man would be very foolish not to give thought to the problems which affect his life. But if such a person devotes all his time and his thought to himself, he becomes extremely selfish. He gives no thought to others, and then his fellow men

begin to dislike him. He cannot be very popular—and everyone wants to be liked by others.

But a more important danger than not being liked results from such selfishness. When a person thinks only about himself and does not care what happens to anybody else, he begins to imagine that the only important things that happen are the ones that happen to *him*. If *he* gets sick, that is important; if someone else gets sick, he is not interested. If *he* becomes poor, or if *he* has a quarrel with his friend, he feels as though the world were coming to an end. His whole world narrows down to his own life and his own interests. Now, in the life of any person disappointments and unhappiness are bound to come. And if one is completely bound up with oneself, these unhappinesses can bring great sorrow.

If, however, a person makes a practice of joining with others in public prayer, he soon begins to realize that his own worries and his own problems are really very small compared with the problems that the whole world has to face. He begins to come out of his little shell and look at the larger life that is going on around him. When this happens, something very important takes place in his attitude toward his own problems. He becomes interested in the welfare of others besides himself, and very soon he comes to realize that, compared to some, he ought to consider himself extremely lucky. In addition, he becomes interested in ideals like justice and peace, ideals which he has inherited from his ancestors and which he in turn will give to his children. He will

be taking part in a big job, a job which all mankind is working on. Then he will not be discouraged by failures. He will understand that even if he cannot finish the job, others will take it over and will carry on—and that, some day, they will be successful.

Thus, he will feel that his life is just one link in a long chain, that he himself is a member of a team that is trying to win a game in which the whole world is playing. And even if he has to be taken out, on account of injury or old age, his teammates will be going ahead toward the goal. Will that not make him happy? Try to picture how a football player feels when he is trying to make a goal for his team: even if he is taken out and a substitute comes in to take his place, he still has the joy of feeling that he has done *his* part.

Team work means cooperation, loyalty, self-sacrifice. These are wonderful qualities which all of us possess, and which we can bring out in ourselves when we work together for a cause. Public prayer does this for us. When people pray together, they lose a great deal of their selfishness, their hatreds and their jealousies. Prayer brings out the best in us, and helps us to be at our best. That is why praying together is so important.

3. *How to Make Public Prayer More Popular*

If it is true that public prayer is so important in the life of a person, that it gives him the burning desire to go out and try to achieve his goal, and that it acts as the enemy of selfishness, *why is it that public prayer is*

not as popular as it should be? Certainly, if one looks at Jewish life, for example, one finds that comparatively few people attend the synagogue more than two or three times a year. Most Jews today go to the synagogue on Rosh Ha-Shanah and Yom Kippur—and hardly ever again until the following Rosh Ha-Shanah. It is true that many Jews go to the synagogue to say Kaddish. But we are not discussing these people. Their going to the synagogue is not the result of their desire to worship in common with other Jews. They are usually interested in showing their respect for their fathers or mothers who have died.

The answer to the question we have asked can be found in the words of Psalm 145: "The Lord is nigh unto all that call upon Him, to all that call upon Him in truth." This means that prayer can be a worthwhile and inspiring activity only to those who *sincerely* wish to live in accordance with the highest laws of Right. We make a serious mistake when we imagine that prayer by itself will make good people of us. Many men and women make this mistake, and then are disappointed when they discover that praying has not helped people to become honest and self-sacrificing.

Public prayer helps those who have done everything in their power to be at their best. How? When, during their daily lives, they have tried to be honest, to deal fairly with their neighbors, to take care of their responsibilities—and they feel that they need strength, encouragement, enthusiasm to *go on*, then the synagogue service can mean something to them. It can help

them to understand that they are not alone in their efforts, that others too are working for the same ideals, and that men and women in former times also worked for these ideals. Then these good people realize that they are in good company, and that, because what they are trying to do is not a mere day-dream of theirs, but is part of the whole story of mankind, they can go back to their duties with new enthusiasm and new hope.

Does this mean that public prayer will not help anyone who is a "sinner"? Is it true that synagogue services will do little for anyone who is not already convinced that he ought to be unselfish and responsible and honest and just? Yes. We must understand that only in the rarest cases will wicked people come to a synagogue service and there become inspired to go out and do good. In the usual cases, a person must enter the synagogue with the determination to "repent," to change his ways of living, and to "cooperate," so to speak, with the service, in remaking his character.

How does it happen, then, that many Jews who are of good character and who try to live in accordance with their highest ideals still feel that the synagogue service does not satisfy them? As we know, many Jews are dissatisfied with the manner of worship in synagogues. They say that it "leaves them cold." They do not get a thrill out of the service. They are not carried away by the prayers. How can we explain this situation? The answer in most cases is this: if a Jew is not educated Jewishly, has no knowledge of the Bible and the other Jewish literature, does not know Jewish his-

tory, and is not active in Jewish affairs, and pays a visit to the synagogue, he is bound to feel somewhat strange to the prayers. This is because he does not feel himself part of the whole Jewish people. He does not appreciate what the Jews have gone through in the past, and he does not understand, therefore, what the prayers really mean. It is obvious that if a Jew were to go into a non-Jewish place of worship, where the services are carried on in a strange language and where he does not understand what is going on, he would not derive much benefit from that service. Many Jews today enter the synagogue and find that they know as little about what is taking place as they would if they were in a non-Jewish house of prayer.

This is what our ancestors meant when they said that an ignorant man cannot be pious. They meant that unless one is educated and has a full understanding of his tradition and his history, he cannot get that thrill in worship which an educated person can get. An example here might help: suppose someone who didn't know anything about music, and who was partly deaf, went to a concert of the symphony orchestra. Would he get anything out of it? Certainly not. In the same way, a Jew, in order to get real joy and inspiration from public prayer, must come prepared.

(1) He must *want* to be helped to be at his best. He must come with an open mind—just as one must come to a concert prepared to listen and capable of hearing.

(2) He must have knowledge—knowledge of the history and the language and the traditions of his people.

Shemini Azeret, then, should be for us the symbol of prayer, of its importance, of its value; and it should help to remind us that prayer can be a powerful influence in our lives if we are prepared mentally and educationally to understand and benefit from its message.

SOME THOUGHTS ON CHAPTER VI

1. Everyone knows the type of person who says: "I don't have to go to a synagogue to pray. When I feel like praying, I go out into the woods and commune with nature." How many people do you know who say this (or something like it)? What sort of prayers are likely to be said in the woods?
2. Think about the last time you attended a patriotic rally, or an assembly at school when the flag was presented. What similarities would you say there were in such a rally or assembly to the part of the synagogue service at which the Torah is taken from the Ark?
3. When people suffer a great sorrow, they usually look to their friends for comfort. What would you consider the best way of cheering up *your* friend?
4. Who do you think gets most out of worship: the person who goes every week to the synagogue, or the one who goes once a year? Why? Who gets most out of a concert: the music lover who goes frequently, or the one who goes once in a while?

5. "What a God-forsaken spot!" This is usually said about a place where very few people live. What would one mean if one said that a particular synagogue was "God-forsaken," even though there was a Torah in the Ark and many prayerbooks in the pews?
6. The opinion has often been expressed that people pray best when they do not understand the meaning of the words they say. Is that altogether true? Is there any value in chanting Hebrew prayers, if one does not know the translation of every word?
7. Should the synagogue service be more like a performance on a stage, or more like a community sing? Should there be a lot of singing by the cantor and little by the congregation, or the other way round?
8. Parents sometimes say: "I don't want to impose my ideas on my children. I will teach them all they need to know, but I will not take them with me to the synagogue. When they get older, they can decide for themselves whether or not they wish to attend." Do you agree with this? If not, why not?
9. How should a Jew behave in a non-Jewish place of worship? Should he remove his hat and recite the prayers? How would you expect a non-Jew to act in a synagogue? Explain your reasons.

*PESAH:**SYMBOL OF FREEDOM*

WHEN OUR ANCESTORS originally settled in Eretz Yisrael (or Canaan, as it was then called), they brought with them certain practices and celebrations which they had developed in the desert. The Canaanites, who had been living in Canaan before the Israelites came, had also observed certain of their own holidays and celebrations. In the course of time, the Israelites learned to live in some respects like the Canaanites, just as we in this country have learned to live in many ways like the Americans. Now, one of the Canaanite holidays was a Spring festival, which celebrated the first harvest. This was known as the Hag-Ha-Matzot (the Feast of Unleavened Bread).

After many years, this Feast of Unleavened Bread was also observed by the Israelites, for they too had become farmers, and the harvest became important to them also. But according to their own traditions it was in the Spring that their ancestors had been freed from Egypt, where they had been slaves. It soon became the practice, therefore, to set aside one whole week in the Spring to celebrate both the harvest and the freedom of the Israelites from Egypt. Thus the Festival of Pesah became a kind of double celebration; but throughout Jewish history our ancestors always

stand by the idea of freedom. Does it mean, for example, that each and every person shall have the right to do absolutely anything he wants? Can it mean that the strong shall have freedom to persecute the weak, without interference? Let us see what freedom means by trying to understand what slavery means.

1. *What Does Freedom Mean?*

If we study the history of human slavery, we find that the one thing slaves have always suffered from was the fact that their lives were lived for others. That is to say, they themselves were unimportant; their masters alone were important. The slaves' lives counted for nothing. Their wishes were not consulted. It did not matter what they desired or what they disliked. Their purpose in life was to *serve* their masters, to make the lives of their masters happy.

The earliest kind of slavery that we know of arose as a result of wars. The leaders of armies, after capturing thousands of enemy soldiers, would sell those soldiers as slaves. At first, they used to kill the captives; but then they realized that they could make a great deal of money out of the captives by selling them. This provided the rich with men who could perform the hard labor of the farm and the home, while they themselves could devote their time to study and to music and art. Thus the slaves were just like tools and animals. Tools, like hammers and ploughs and rakes, helped to get work done; animals were used to help draw ploughs

and wagons; and now slaves were used like tools. *To be a slave means to be used as a tool, to make life happy and good for others, without any regard for the life of the slave himself.*

Although we today have officially abolished slavery, slavery continues to exist. Where? Wherever people have to work in order that *others* may enjoy a happy and good life. Wherever people are used as tools, we have slavery. There are still many people who think that this kind of slavery is right. They say: if we want to produce great books and works of art and music, we must give the "best" people time and leisure. In order to give them time and leisure, the average man must do the "dirty work." Jewish religion says *no*. Slavery is contrary to the laws of God. No human being should live only for the sake of another person. No man should be a tool for another.

This does not mean that all of us are born with the same abilities, and all should do the same kind of work. It does not mean that we can possibly get along without *somebody's* doing the "dirty work." It does mean, however, that the people who do the toiling *should have a say in the government*. A person who toils is not a slave so long as he has a voice in deciding what the work shall be, and for what purpose the work shall be done. Democracy is the form of government which attempts to do away with slavery, because it gives each and every person a voice in the government of the nation.

But we make a mistake when we imagine that slavery

thought of Pesah as, first and foremost, the Festival of Freedom.

There are, however, two remarkable facts about Pesah which we should take note of: (1) that the Israelites reminded themselves every year of the fact that they were descended from slaves. This is very unusual. Most nations would wish to forget about their lowly beginnings. Most people today who are fairly well off usually take a great deal of trouble to hide the fact that their parents or their grandparents were poor. Why did the Israelites go out of their way to be reminded that the Jewish nation was born at a time when most of the people were just newly freed slaves?

(2) The second unusual fact to take note of is this: the Exodus from Egypt (exodus means "going out") became a symbol for the Jews. That is, they saw in this freedom from Egypt the work of their God, the work of a God who believed in freedom, who was a powerful Force protecting the weak against the strong, the few against the many. The whole story of their escape from Egypt was not merely one event in the life of the Israelites; it was for them a sign that God loved freedom more than slavery, and that, therefore, freedom and not slavery was to be fought for and worked for, not only by Jews but by all peoples.

That is why the Exodus from Egypt played such a very important part in the life of the Jewish people. In the morning prayers and in the evening prayers, in the Sabbath Kiddush and in the grace after meals, mention was always made of the Exodus. And every year,

at Pesah time, a very happy celebration took place at which the whole story of the Exodus was retold. In fact, during the most unhappy periods in the life of the Jewish people, the memory of the Exodus encouraged the Jews. They said to themselves: "Today we are slaves, we are strangers in strange lands; we are being persecuted and driven; but we have hope because God once freed our ancestors from slavery in Egypt, and if He could free us once, He can free us again, and *He will.*"

Today, the Festival of Pesah should be particularly important for us, because thousands of Jews as well as millions of other people, are in bondage. That is, they are living the lives of slaves: they do not have the freedom to act or think as they please; they are forever worried about the future; their lives are not safe. Has the Festival of Pesah some message for them, as well as for us? If we study the Festival of Pesah carefully and try to understand exactly what it meant in the lives of our ancestors, we shall certainly learn a great deal from it about how we too may be freed from slavery. We shall also learn one additional fact, and that is that the freedom of the Jewish people today cannot be achieved unless *all* the persecuted peoples of the world are also set free. Let us see if Pesah can teach us something about what we and they must do in order to be free again.

But it is not enough to say we believe in freedom; for so many people misunderstand what freedom really means. It is necessary to define exactly what we under-

applies only to individual men and women. It applies to groups as well. For example, a minority group within a nation is being enslaved when the majority forces it to become like the majority. We Jews would be living as slaves if we were not permitted to live our own lives, to be ourselves, if we were forced to become exactly like the non-Jews in religion and in home and synagogue life. Freedom means *the right to be different*, the right to be oneself.

Freedom means, however, not only the right to be different from others who are not of the same religion or traditions; it means also the right to be different from one's own ancestors in the same group. There are many people who tell us that we must accept everything that our ancestors taught us about life and the world and ideals and ethics. They tell us that our elders were always wiser than we, and that we can do best by following in their footsteps. Such an attitude makes it difficult for us to be ourselves, or to make the most of ourselves.

Unless we are free to make up our own minds, or to follow our own best judgment, we are slaves to tradition and to authority. Certainly, according to the ideals of freedom handed down to us by our ancestors, it is our right to create our own standards of ethics and conduct. Instead of merely following blindly the beliefs and practices that have come down to us, we should seek to make the most of our lives in accordance with our own ideas of what is best for ourselves and for society. Many intelligent people become impatient with reli-

gion, and with Jewish religion, because they are told that they must not think for themselves, but must accept blindly the advice and guidance of the past. We should be doing religion a great deal of harm if we did not emphasize the ideal of freedom in religion itself.

2. *What Stands in the Way of Freedom?*

If we were to ask the people we know whether they agree with these ideas or not, we should probably discover that very few would have any objections to them. Most people believe in freedom as it has been described here. Why then is it so difficult to bring about this freedom? What stands in the way? In general, we might say that the first and most important obstacle to freedom is the *desire for power*. In all ages and in every country, the masses of people have found that there are always a few strong and rich people who love to rule over others, to dictate to them how they should live, to control their lives. Sometimes the rulers of a nation, not satisfied with their position as rulers of only one land, go out and conquer other nations. They do this because they have a strong desire to exercise *power*. For example, in our day we find nations ruled by dictators, who not only dictate what their citizens shall read in the newspapers, and hear over the radio, and learn at school, but who in addition send armies out to other countries to rule over *their* people. This is what the German people did when Hitler and his gang were in power. This is what is going on in the communist countries.

We are sometimes told that the only way to overcome this obstacle is to have the people who are enslaved rise up in revolt. But here we meet a second obstacle. That is, the men who are enslaved are so often discouraged and weary and weak that all their spirit has gone out of them. They are too tired to fight back. This happened, for example, when Moses came to the Israelites in Egypt and wanted to organize them for freedom. They had grown so used to being slaves that the thought of freedom did not attract them. Freedom means responsibility, as we have seen. Freedom means that one has to be one's own master; this means one has to fight one's own battles.

The slave gives up his freedom to work for his master, but he is sometimes rewarded by knowing that he need not worry about his food and his shelter. Not to have to worry about these things is a very great advantage. The Negroes in the South were slaves; but they knew that they would always have enough to eat, and a bed to sleep in, and even protection in old age. When Lincoln freed them, many Negroes refused to leave their masters. Why? Because from then on they would have to look after their own affairs and make their own livelihood.

Is slavery, then, better than freedom? Jewish religion says *no*. It is better to be free than to be a slave, even though freedom is sometimes harder than slavery. Freedom gives one an opportunity to make something of oneself. Slavery encourages laziness of the mind. Let us see how slavery makes our minds lazy: In former

times most people did not get an education. They did not know how to read and to write, and as a result they knew very little about the world. Not knowing anything about the world, they gave no thought to the many problems that the world had to solve. A little boy at the age of three, for example, seems to be extremely well satisfied if he has enough to eat and to drink; he does not have to think about problems; he does not even have to think about the things we are now discussing: whether freedom is better than slavery. His mind is not troubled by ideals.

But if we give the matter a bit more thought, we realize that the desire to be "let alone," being satisfied with slavery, if accepted by all people, would have made of this world a very sad place to live in. For, let us ask ourselves these questions: To whom do we owe our houses, our electric lights, our radios, our telegraph, our telephone, our airplanes, our steamships, our bridges and roads, our automobiles, our knowledge of medicine, our X-ray machines and telescopes, all those inventions and discoveries that make our lives so comfortable and interesting? To whom do we owe the printing press, with its books and magazines, and newspapers and libraries? Do we not owe all things to just those men who refused to let well enough alone, and who, like pioneers, explored the unknown and the dangerous wilderness?

If everyone had been mentally lazy, we would today be living in a jungle, and travel by ox-cart, and live in terror of wild animals, and die from the many dis-

eases which today we know how to fight. Is it not clear, then, that in the long run freedom of the mind is better for everyone? All that we know of by the name of *civilization* has come to us through the efforts of those who overcame the obstacles that stand in the way of freedom. Pesah teaches us that if we want to make of this world a happy place to live in, we must never forget that freedom is better than slavery.

3. *The Force That Makes Men Free*

If there is such a great temptation to be slaves, how does it happen that people have been able to overcome that temptation? If strong tyrants who love power have always tried to dictate to their people, how is it that these people have again and again rebelled? Human history, as we know, is filled with stories of revolutions. We know that within the last 200 years there was a revolution in France against the King and nobles, in America against Great Britain. One who has studied history is bound to have come across numerous cases of people rising up against their rulers. How did this come about?

We can get some idea of the answer to this question by studying the story in the Bible of the way Pharaoh treated the Israelites when Moses tried to set them free. We must recall that each time Pharaoh decided to send out the Israelites, God "hardened the heart of Pharaoh," and once again he changed his mind. Pharaoh did this again and again. How can we under-

stand this story? Has it any meaning for us? Is it logical? After all, why should Pharaoh have been punished for his cruelty, if "God hardened" his heart?

To put the answer into our own language, we should say: God helps the slave to go free by making the master more and more cruel. Somehow or other, whenever masters own slaves, the slaves seem willing to remain slaves so long as they get food and shelter. But after a while the master, in his cruelty, goes too far, and tries to make his slaves work for him *without giving them what they need in order to live*. He is not satisfied only to profit by their work. He tries to get more and more from them. In the end, they rebel. This is the story of every revolution. If the rulers used their intelligence, they would understand that their slaves would be satisfied as long as they did not go hungry; but, in every case, God hardens the hearts of the rulers. They become greedy. They want everything for themselves, and do not trouble to think about their slaves. Then they are faced with rebellion.

Thus there is a Force in the world that helps men become free by urging the oppressors to imitate Pharaoh. If we understand this correctly, we will see in every tyrant and oppressor a reminder to us that we must make use of the Power in us that demands freedom. Unfortunately, so many of us have to be reminded. But once we *are* reminded, we fight for our freedom.

Pesah teaches us, therefore, that there is a Power in us that seeks freedom, and a Power in the world that

helps us to remember that freedom is precious: It teaches us that we must not be satisfied until slavery has been abolished from the world. Pesah teaches us, furthermore, that God, the Power in the world that makes us continually seek freedom, will not let us rest until the goal has been reached. He will bring Pharaohs upon us in every generation to remind us of the horrors of slavery, until the time comes when we appreciate the beauties of freedom and watch over it so that it is never again taken from us.

SOME THOUGHTS ON CHAPTER VII

1. People who come from poor families, and prosper, usually prefer to forget and to have others forget that they were once poor. Why is it that a people like the Jews, whose ancestors were once slaves, concern themselves in their religion with the common man? Is this a contradiction?
2. You often hear people say that the Jews will never achieve freedom until *all* the peoples of the world are free. Does this mean that Jews should devote themselves first and foremost to solving the problems of the Negroes, the Chinese, etc.?
3. Political freedom means little without economic freedom. What does this refer to?
4. "Slavery in the midst of freedom," refers to Jews who are afraid to be different from the non-Jews. Do you know any Jews like that? How do they show it?

5. Psychologists tell us that a frequent occurrence is the refusal of people to "grow up." They want to be like children, and act like children. This is called "infantilism." Why, do you think, should anyone want to refuse to grow up? Has it anything to do with the problem of freedom?
6. How would you interpret the phrase "Divine discontent"? When is discontent "Divine"? When is it not?
7. A study of World War II reveals a case of God "hardening the heart of Pharaoh." Discuss the rise and fall of Hitler from this point of view.
8. Habit is both an obstacle to freedom and a means to freedom. It is an obstacle to freedom when it prevents you from changing your behavior in such a way as to improve yourself. It helps you by making it unnecessary for you to waste your time making up your mind every time you want to do something you know you ought to do. What does this mean? Give some examples of each.
9. According to Jewish religion, people have the freedom of choice; they can decide whether to do the right thing or the wrong thing. How is this related to our discussion about "Fate," and belief in "God as Creator"?
10. Do you believe that freedom should have no limits? That is, that people should be free to do anything they wish? If not, what limits should be placed on freedom of speech or freedom of religion?

*SHABUOT:**SYMBOL OF RIGHTEOUS LAW*

ORIGINALLY, the Festival of Shabuot was only a nature festival. On that day our ancestors celebrated the ingathering of the first fruits. Later, however, they came to believe that it was at this season of the year that the Israelites received the Torah from God at Mount Sinai. When the Jews were exiled from Eretz Yisrael and were no longer farmers, the whole idea of celebrating the ingathering of fruits became unimportant compared with the celebration of the Torah.

For our ancestors, the Torah was the most valuable gift ever given by God. They believed that in the Torah they could find laws which were the most just and righteous in the world. As long as they had the Torah to live by, they did not mind any of the suffering which they had to undergo, for they believed that by living in accordance with the laws of the Torah they would not only gain happiness here on earth, but also everlasting life in the future world.

Today, Jews no longer feel about the Torah as their ancestors did. Our study of history and science has made us question whether the Torah really came to our ancestors in the way described in the Bible. And if the events described did not really happen, it is difficult for

us to observe the Festival of Shabuot with the same kind of enthusiasm as did our ancestors. But has Shabuot a meaning for us today? We believe so. If we follow carefully this study of the Festival and what it has meant, we shall be able to find in Shabuot once again a most important message.

1. *Gods Were Always Interested
in Men's Actions*

No matter which nation or tribe we might study, we would always find that people have believed in gods, and have believed that the gods were interested in how men acted. They always believed that the laws governing the group or the tribe had been given to them by their gods. The Greeks, for example, believed that their chief God, Zeus, sent out thirty thousand messengers all over the world to watch how people behaved, and to report back to him.

One of the reasons why Judaism, and later Christianity, became so popular with the people of other nations was that they accepted the idea of a God who was not only interested in how people behaved, but who demanded that they act in a particular way. The God of Jewish religion demanded justice and righteousness; these qualities, they believed, were the only ones which a real god should demand; if a god did not expect people to act righteously, he was not entitled to be called a god.

It is thus clear that two important facts must be

kept in mind always when we think about people's ideas about religion, and about Judaism in particular.

(1) People always want to feel that their moral laws are not just their own inventions, but are the commands of God. Otherwise they will accept those laws half-heartedly. They will obey them when it is convenient to do so, but they will disobey them if the laws prove to be too difficult to follow. Only when people believe that moral laws come from God will they obey those laws in good times and hard times, when it is easy to obey them and when obeying them means self-sacrifice.

(2) Jewish religion emphasized the idea of righteousness more than any other religion did. The most typical statement which the Prophets made was the one made by Isaiah when he said, "The Lord of Hosts is exalted through justice, the God, the Holy One, is sanctified through righteousness." By this he meant that the only proper way to worship God was to practice justice and righteousness; God cannot be "exalted" or praised except through the highest moral conduct. Since our ancestors believed that the Torah contained all the laws of justice and righteousness, they naturally came to the conclusion that God was the author of the Torah.

When our ancestors, therefore, proclaimed that the Torah was "revealed by God," they were saying in their way what we should say somewhat differently; namely, that we can come to see the working of justice in the world. Whenever we see someone doing an act of justice, we should realize that that person is making use

of that Power in him which we call God. We have seen in previous chapters that we can recognize the working of that Power—God—whenever people seek the perfect life, when they try to remake the world or to remake themselves, when people try to cooperate with one another, and when people strive for freedom. Now we should understand that all of these efforts are part of a larger one, and that larger effort is to bring *justice* into the world.

2. *Why We Need Religion to Guide Us*

We have all heard people say that in our age religion is being neglected. What is meant by that statement? Some people mean that, whereas at one time practically everybody went either to church or to synagogue, today many people do not attend services at all. But the most important meaning that this statement has is that people, for the most part, do not any longer turn to their religion in order to learn how to behave. In former times almost everyone was guided in his conduct by his religious beliefs; today religion plays little part in guiding conduct.

Why is that? Mostly because, in modern times, people have grown to depend largely upon their reason and their experience. They say: we do not need any beliefs about God in order to know what is best to do. If we use our intelligence, our reason, we will soon learn what is right and what is wrong. Unfortunately, they

are mistaken. When we look about us, we find that very often people use their intelligence for wicked purposes.

For example, we have been taught that in nature the "strongest" always survive. Some scientists try to convince us that, in the struggle for existence among animals and plants, the weak are destroyed, that in this way the best and the strongest manage to come through, and a better type of living being is produced. Therefore, they say, the same should apply to human beings; if we permit people to fight against one another, the strongest and "fittest" will win, and we will thereby do away with the weaklings and those who are not tough and strong. In this way, they justify wars. In this way, the strong is made to feel that he is doing the world a favor by destroying all his weaker opponents. What is the result? We do not have justice—but war, conflict and hatred.

Sometimes people say that we ought to base our conduct on experience. They say: let us examine how people have acted throughout the ages, and then we will know what the "natural" and normal way to act is. This, too, is a sad mistake, because we would certainly find that throughout the ages people have acted unjustly. Would this make it right to act unjustly? Is it not possible that people have been on the wrong track for centuries? Is it not just as logical to learn from experience that injustice always leads to war and conflict, and to conclude, therefore, that we ought to act differently?

On what, then, should we base our conduct? The

only basis we can find for moral conduct is the basis which religion gives to us. It teaches us that each and every human being has in him something of God, of that Power which makes for freedom and justice, and that therefore we must base our conduct upon whatever helps to bring out this Power in man. If we find that a certain type of conduct injures freedom and justice, prevents a person from being at his best, stands in the way of his making the most of himself, then we know that that conduct is bad.

Will a person be willing to obey such a law of morals? We believe so, because he knows that if he obeys that law, others will obey it too, and if others obey it, he himself will benefit. He is interested in being at his best, in being free, and in having justice done to him; he will therefore respect those rights in others. But if he believes that men are just animals, then he will not believe that there is any Power for good in his fellow men, and he will try only to destroy them.

Belief in God, therefore, will lead to justice to others and to oneself; refusing to believe that people are endowed with the force of God will lead only to injustice and cruelty.

3. *Religion in International Affairs*

Just as individual human beings need religion to guide them in their conduct toward one another, so nations need religion. When nations fail to understand that peace and prosperity depend upon the justice

which is done to each and every country, large and small, war breaks out. Now, the experience of World War II has shown us how terribly destructive war has become. In fact, with the new weapons invented in recent years, like atomic bombs and missiles, another war might blot out civilized life as we know it. Unless the peoples of the world show a new and altogether different spirit of brotherhood and cooperation, the future will bring only suffering and death.

Nations must become as interested in the welfare of the world as in the welfare of their own citizens. They dare not center their attention alone on power and wealth—at the expense of other peoples. They must work toward helping all the men and women and children of the world to live in security and plenty.

One of the encouraging results of the last horrible war has been the creation of the United Nations. The purpose of this organization is to set up *laws* that will govern the relations between nations, and to see to it that these laws are actually lived up to. The various nations have even agreed to the idea of an international army, which would stop any nation from breaking the law. But, with the best machinery in the world for preventing strife between nations, we cannot look forward to a peaceful world unless this new spirit of brotherhood and cooperation is present. It is only a religion which makes righteousness and love its most important teachings that can make a United Nations organization work. If the *will* is dead, or even weak, the machinery will be of no use. That is why it is so important for nations, as well as for individuals, to believe in, and obey, a religious

law of ethics, and to make the teaching of that law their most important task.

But it is not only the attitude of one nation toward another that must be changed. It is also the attitude of a nation to its citizens. It must make as its goal that of helping each and every human being within its borders to work together for the benefit of all. Belonging to a nation should be the means of making the most of one's life, of being at one's best. This means setting up those laws within each country which will make certain that the citizens have a chance to do that for which they are best fitted. It means doing away with race and religious hatred. It means outlawing discrimination. It means assuring that each person will feel so safe and so satisfied that he will not seek to harm others, or want to prevent them from enjoying their full rights. In other words, the goal of every nation should be social righteousness.

This is what Jewish nationhood has always stressed. To be a patriotic Jew always meant to live in accordance with the Torah. We should act in the spirit of Samuel, who, we are told, was very hesitant about granting our ancestors a king. They wanted to be like the other nations which were organized for the purpose of fighting. Samuel believed that this was absolutely the wrong reason for any group to organize itself into a nation. He believed that a group of people should organize itself into a nation only in order *to cooperate better with one another, and to give each person a chance to make the most of himself*. That is why, even when our ancestors did get a king, and set up their own govern-

ment, the king was always criticized by the Prophets whenever he tried to make the kingdom an instrument for war. If the king did not rule by the law of righteousness and justice to all men, that king was disobeying God, according to their way of thinking.

In the minds of our ancestors, it was not the king that made the Jews a nation; it was the Torah, their laws, their schools and all their institutions for bringing out the best in people. And so it happened that even after the king was taken captive, and the state was conquered and the Temple was destroyed, the Jews continued to live as a people; this was possible because nobody could take the Torah away from them. During all the centuries since the year 70 C.E., when our ancestors were sent into exile by the Romans, the Jewish people kept itself alive by means of loyalty to the Torah.

4. *The Art of Living Together*

How can we bring about righteousness? This is a very important question because very often we may want something very much and yet not know how to obtain it. Everyone agrees that righteousness is desirable, and yet we seem to find it very difficult to bring about. The Torah helps us to understand what must be done if righteousness is to be achieved. What does the Torah teach us? That justice and righteousness must become part of law. That is, we cannot succeed in making people righteous merely by convincing them that they *ought* to be righteous. Righteousness is not only a matter of one's attitude; it is a matter of one's actions.

A man may be a very "good hearted" person; he may mean well; he may have very good intentions. But his actions may be very harmful. Law and action must go together in bringing about righteousness.

Our ancestors made a wonderful discovery; they discovered that if people are to become moral and honest, they must learn a "technique." They must learn to follow certain rules. We, too, must learn to follow certain rules. We have since learned that this is true of all things: to play the violin, one must develop *technique*; to carry on experiments in the scientific laboratory, one must learn certain definite techniques. The art of living together, too, cannot be learned merely by *wishing* to live together in peace and harmony; society must develop certain techniques. The Torah was the technique which our ancestors learned. Now, if we want to learn how to live together in harmony, we too must learn a technique for our time; and if we examine what the Torah taught, we may get a clue as to the technique which we must develop.

The Torah contains three major ideas about righteousness: the ideas of love, justice and purity. With these three, we can master the art of living together.

Love: Without love, human beings are not really human. No one can hope to achieve righteousness without the use of love. Love means sympathy, kindness, and the desire to be helpful. The Torah teaches us to respect and honor our parents, to treat the stranger with consideration, to have pity on all living beings. The Torah teaches us to be grateful for the good things of life, and to remember that we have the good

things of life through the cooperation of other people. We should, therefore, love our fellow men and understand that without them we should be helpless and alone. If we want to have peace and righteousness, we must cultivate the habit of loving our fellow men.

Justice: Justice means honesty, fair dealing, and rewarding each person according to what he deserves. Justice means taking into consideration the needs of human beings, and seeing to it that those needs are satisfied. The basic needs are food, clothing and shelter. Unless every human being has those needs satisfied, we shall never have peace in the world. Dissatisfied people will always create disturbances and unrest so long as they are deprived of these three necessities. The Torah tried to work out a system whereby each and every person would have food, clothing and shelter. The laws contained in the Torah were very advanced for the times when it was composed. Today the legislatures make many, many laws, but unless these laws provide for the three needs of all human beings, they do not serve their purpose.

Purity: The Torah realized that happiness can best be achieved through living in peace and harmony with one's family; and many laws are contained in the Torah which try to arrange family life in accordance with these ideals. Today the laws dealing with the family, with the relations of husband and wife, with the relations of children and parents, must be so worked out as to lead to the harmony of the whole family. A happy husband and father, a happy wife and mother, and happy son or daughter, make happy human beings,

human beings who are more likely to become honest and worthwhile citizens of society than those who have not the blessings of a loving home life.

Very often it is found that young men and women who are convicted of crimes against the city or state are people who have not had a loving home life. The influence of the family is very great upon growing young people, and if righteousness and peace are to reign in society, family life must be strengthened.

These three, then, are the general laws which must be observed if righteousness is to be achieved. But we must understand that times change, and that, in different ages, different opinions arise as to what love or justice or purity means. Even our own Jewish laws did not remain the same all the time. The basic laws of our Torah were studied and interpreted, and sometimes changed as time went on. The Mishnah and the Talmud, and the later Jewish literature, contain endless discussions of these laws. Rabbis realized that certain changes had to be made, and the law developed. A slow evolution took place. But throughout all these changes, one basic idea remained; that is, that the art of living together can be mastered only when we have learned the laws that govern human life. We must try at all times to discover what these laws are. We shall recognize them when we find that they express our highest conception of love, justice and purity.

In summarizing the Festival of Shabuot as the symbol of righteous law, we should always bear in mind that, if law is to be our guide in life, we must think of it

as being the result of that Force in us which leads us to righteousness. Unless we believe that righteousness is caused by God, by that Power in us and in the world which helps it to come about, then we shall frequently be discouraged and feel hopeless. We must repeat here what was pointed out in earlier chapters, that belief in God means belief that the ideals which we hold dear are *possible*, that mankind *can* achieve them. This is true not only of the ideals of cooperation, or of remaking the world, or of remaking ourselves, or of freedom, but also of the ideal of righteousness.

We cannot ever *prove* that these ideals are possible; we must have faith that they are. The difference between the religious person and one who is irreligious is just this: the irreligious person says: "I accept these ideals as my own and I will try my best to achieve them; but I am pretty sure that I will not succeed." The religious person says: "These are my ideals and I *know* that they can be achieved because I believe in God, I believe that the desire which I have to see these ideals realized is the result of a Power in me that makes me want justice, peace, cooperation and righteousness. This Power in me is also in all other people. Together, with the help of this Power, with the help of God, we shall build a new world, a world based upon justice and peace."

Thus, the belief in God gives us courage and strength, determination and the will to do our best, to be at our best, and to remake the world. With that belief in God, we can never be defeated.

SOME THOUGHTS ON CHAPTER VIII

1. Our ancestors believed that God had revealed the entire Torah to Moses in the wilderness. What led them to believe this? Can we believe this today? In what sense is it true that the Torah was "revealed"?
2. According to many Christian teachers, Judaism stresses justice, while Christianity stresses love. According to Jewish teachers, Judaism stresses both, because there is no real justice without love or mercy. Why is justice incomplete without love?
3. The Nazis, during World War II, insisted that cruelty was better than kindness. Jews, and other enemies of Nazism, insisted that kindness was better than cruelty. How would you prove that one is better than another? On what would you base your argument that peace is better than war? On logic? On experience? On faith?
4. "Faith in Man" means believing that people want to do what is right, and if given a chance will choose the right rather than the wrong. How is "Faith in God" related to "Faith in Man"? Can you have one without the other?
5. Jewish religion always stressed the "rule of law" as against the "rule of men." Why is the rule of law better? How does the rule of law prevent tyrants from oppressing their people?
6. If you want to love your fellow men, you have to understand them. If you want to understand them, you must first understand yourself. Explain.

7. One of the strongest pillars of society is the family; and in order for the family unit to be strong, the command "Honor thy father and thy mother" must be observed. Do you think parents should "honor their children"? What does that mean?
8. In the course of Jewish history, many laws have been changed, some added, others discarded; but certain laws have never changed. Try to list those which you believe have never changed, and never will be changed as long as Jewish religion continues.
9. Studies have been made of young men and women in reform schools, and evidence has been gathered to show that there are at least as many among the inmates who had a "religious education" as there are who did not have such an education. Does this mean that religious education has no effect upon character? Does it mean that ethical character cannot be developed by teaching? Is there any other explanation?
10. Some people believe that discrimination because of religion, race or nationality can be overcome by passing laws punishing such discrimination. Do you think passing laws will do any good? Will that solve the problem? Will it do *no* good?

HANUKKAH AND PURIM: SYMBOLS OF THE POWER OF RELIGION

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HEN, IN THE YEAR 165 B.C.E., the Maccabees, under the leadership of Judas Maccabeus, defeated the Syrian Greeks in battle, the most important result in the minds of our ancestors was the fact that they were once again free to practice their religion. Neither the victory in battle nor the political independence which they had won seemed to them to matter as much as the rededication of the Temple. That is why the Festival of Hanukkah commemorates only the rededication of the Temple, and nothing else.

Our ancestors were absolutely correct in emphasizing the religious victory, because it was religion which helped the Jewish people to survive. Years later, the Jews lost their political independence; still later Bar Kokba tried again to win independence from Rome, and failed; yet Judaism continued on. The religion of the Jewish people has meant much to the Jews and to the world simply because it was more important and more lasting than any political power. Thus Hanukkah, by reminding us of the times of Judas Maccabeus, reminds us each year of the truth that religion is the surest way of keeping a nation alive.

In the darkest hours of our history, the memory of the lighted Menorah helped our people to have faith in

their future, because they believed firmly that God had saved Israel, and would therefore save Israel again. It is not enough, however, for us to say that religion saved the Jewish nation. We should ask: how did religion do this? What was there about the Jewish religion which made it possible for Israel to survive? This question will be answered in the section that follows.

1. *How Jewish Religion Saved the Jewish People*

When the Greeks began to live in and around Palestine, our ancestors soon learned many of their ways and their habits. In fact, they were very much attracted to the Greek way of living, just as today many of our own people are attracted by the ways and habits of the nations among whom they live: American, French, English, and so on. Yet our ancestors were loyal to the Jewish way of life. Why? Because through it they learned a religion which they could respect. Why did they respect their religion? Because it created in them a loyalty not only to their own nation, its history, literature, customs, habits and language, but also a loyalty to the highest ideals of mankind. If their religion had made them loyal only to their political state, then, with the destruction of the state, their way of life would have come to an end. But their religion created in them the desire to achieve great *human* ideals, such as justice and peace; that is why they continued to be loyal to that way of life, no matter what happened to their state.

Let us see how, in the various periods of Jewish history, Jewish religion helped the Jewish nation to survive. When the Israelites first came to Canaan, they found living there a population of Canaanites with whom they gradually merged. Why was it that in this merger the Canaanite religion did not win out, and the new people which grew out of the merger was not one big Canaanite nation? Why was it that Palestine became a Jewish land? The answer is: the Baal, which the Canaanites worshiped, did not represent high ideals. The God of the Israelites came to be the symbol of justice, freedom and peace, and the people, therefore, flocked to the worship of the God of Israel and forgot about Baal.

In the Babylonian exile, the Jews were tempted to forget their God. Had He not permitted them to be exiled; and did they not now find themselves in a rich and prosperous country? Why should they not have adopted the God of the Babylonians, since there seemed to be no future for the Jewish people? But again, the leaders interpreted the events of the Jewish people in an original way. They said, "The exile to Babylonia did not come about because the God of Israel was weak. On the contrary, it was He who brought the Babylonians to Palestine to destroy it and to exile the Jews. It was all part of His plan to show His people that He was God, not only of one people but of all the earth."

As a result of this interpretation, the Jews realized that the God of Israel ruled the world according to a plan. This had been the message of the Prophets, and now the people realized that the Prophets had spoken the truth.

As a result, they brought together the writings of the Prophets and the traditional writings containing the laws and history of their nation, and they introduced the practice of studying them and reading them regularly in meetings. Thus the synagogue came into existence. Here the Jews learned that it was possible to live in accordance with God's laws even outside their own land. Of course, the Jews hoped fervently to return to their land, but they now understood that if they expected to be given the privilege of returning, they must be prepared to live in accordance with the laws of God.

Thus, when they did have an opportunity to come back to Palestine, they planned a new kind of society; not one based upon the leadership of a king, but one based upon the Torah as the constitution. The new society, they believed, would become a model one for the whole world, and thus they would be able to teach the world the principles of justice and righteousness. The Jewish people would then have a mission in the world, a purpose, and a goal.

Thus the exile to Babylonia, far from destroying the Jewish people, gave it new strength and new purpose. All this came about through the religion of the people, through thinking of God as standing for human ideals such as justice and peace.

When the Jews, back in the Land, came into contact with the life of the Greeks who had settled there and who in fact became the political rulers there, many of them were tempted to find in Greek life attractive features which they did not find in their own. The

Greeks were famous for their artists and sculptors, their dances and their games, their theatre and their philosophy. The Jews wondered whether they ought not to abandon their Judaism for this new Hellenism (Greek life). But soon they began to realize that the Greek way of life, for all its attractiveness, was only a thin covering-over of cruelty and hatred. The Greeks as a whole were not interested in kindness and peace; they loved to fight and they oppressed their slaves. They had nice manners, but underneath they were heartless and violent.

The leaders among the Jews realized that they must teach their people the truth about the Greeks and about Judaism. How were they going to show their people that even though the Greeks were for the time being the powerful group, in the long run their culture and civilization were bound to be destroyed? This they accomplished by teaching the Jews that God planned to remake the world some time in the future, and rebuild it on the basis of justice and kindness. The leaders tried to make the Jews understand that they must not judge the world by the present time. It is true, they said, that today the Greeks rule the world; but the time will come when the ideals of Israel will triumph; in the "World to come," the Torah will become the law of the whole world.

By restoring the faith of the Jews in the future, the religious teachers helped their people to survive. And what they predicted came true: the Greeks and their civilization died out, and the Jews continued for cen-

turies after. The same thing happened later, when the Jews came under the rule of Rome. Rome seemed so powerful that for a time it looked as though no power would ever be able to destroy it. But the religious teachers among the Jews insisted that any empire, built upon power and violence, was bound to disappear, and that only those nations which lived in accordance with peace and justice would survive.

The Jews clung to their religion in the hope that the time would soon come when God would remake the world; Rome disappeared and the Jewish people lived on. Thus the Jewish nation survived as a result of their religion, which taught them to be loyal to great human ideals. The Babylonians, the Greeks, the Romans and all other powerful empires taught their people to have faith in their kings and their armies. In the end, the kings died and the armies were defeated—and the nations died out. The Jews were taught to have faith in high ideals, and they lived on.

2. *Can Jewish Religion Save the Jews Today?*

Today we find many Jews who, like some of their ancestors, think that they ought to imitate the non-Jews in whatever they do. We are only too familiar with Jews who are "social climbers"; that is, Jews who always try to act like the non-Jews, and even to conceal their names and their Jewishness in order to appear as though they were not Jews. Usually, these people imi-

tate the worst features of non-Jewish life: the love for money and power, the desire to be stylish and sophisticated. People who are social climbers usually become so because they think that the most important goal in life is success, usually success in money-making. These people are always afraid that some one may think they are too Jewish, and such people are very often most unhappy. Any human being would be unhappy if he were always in the grip of fear, fear of any kind. Hanukkah should teach us that the Jewish people cannot survive in a healthy and normal way by this method.

We will prosper and get along well with our fellow men only if we try to be ourselves. Non-Jews will not like us any better—in fact, they may dislike us—if we insist upon trying to imitate and ape them. The Hellenists among the Jews thought that they were going to improve their condition by imitating the Greeks; in the end, their own Jewish people developed contempt and disrespect for them. If Jews want to gain the love and respect of their fellow men, they should strive to live up to the high ideals which their people and their religion teach them.

On the other hand, Jews should learn to adopt that which is fine and wholesome in the lives of their non-Jewish neighbors. We should not reject everything that is non-Jewish simply because it is non-Jewish. There was a time when Jews felt that they had to reject whatever the non-Jews accepted. This would be a mistake today. Our Jewish lives can become all the richer and

more interesting if we find some ideas or habits or customs among our fellow men which can be of help in bringing about justice, peace and brotherhood. For example, most synagogues have adopted the practice of observing Thanksgiving Day, Memorial Day and other American holidays. These new customs have not weakened Jewish life; on the contrary, they have made it more meaningful. A healthy Judaism need not be afraid to absorb good ideas and habits from others.

Problems of social and political nature should become part of our religious study and discussion; our religion should help us to understand the burning questions of the day, even though they are not strictly Jewish; these problems we share with our non-Jewish neighbors. But if we hope to make Jewish religion a powerful force in our lives, we must try to understand what our tradition has to teach us concerning these problems. If not, many of our people will wonder what religion has to do with their lives altogether.

What is true of Jewish religion is true of everything Jewish. Jewish literature, language, customs, celebrations, education: all these must be developed in such a way as to make them helpful to us in being at our best and in bringing to our society justice, freedom and peace. Jews will be happy to be Jews when they can find in their life as a people the inspiration for "the perfect life." If we should lose sight of this truth, we should be in danger of transforming the Jewish people into the kind of people which the Greeks and Romans were. If we develop loyalty among Jews *only* to the

Jewish people and its political ambitions; if we are going to become patriots of the Jewish people in a way that will bring out in us hatred toward other nations, we are running the danger of becoming a menace to the world, instead of a blessing.

The Jewish people will survive in our day only if we do what our ancestors did; they learned from their Judaism to be loyal to the highest human ideals. We too must learn to be true to the highest human ideals through our Judaism. If we do, the Jewish people will survive; the Jews will not want to give up their peoplehood, if that peoplehood helps them to be at their best. In addition, the hopes which Jews cherish will have a better chance to come true.

3. *Jewish Survival as a Power for Good*

The Festival of Purim is celebrated because, in ancient times, when the Jews lived under Persian rule, a wicked man by the name of Haman tried to get the king of Persia to do away with all the Jews, and he failed in his purpose. The heroine of the story, as it is told to us in the Biblical Book of Esther, is the Jewish queen by that name; and the hero was her uncle, Mordecai. When we celebrate this holiday, we do so with a great deal of hope in our hearts, because in our day we find many Hamans in many lands who are trying in their way to do exactly what Haman tried to do in his way. And we express the hope that the modern Hamans may fail, just as the original Haman failed.

But expressing this hope is not enough for modern Jews. In ancient times, our ancestors had faith in God. They believed that God would protect them under all conditions, and if they suffered, they believed it was because God wished them to suffer. Our ancestors believed that their suffering was part of God's plan in the world. Today, however, Jews do not accept their suffering in the same spirit. They are not quite so certain that they suffer for a cause, or in the name of some great purpose. And if they are told that their suffering has a meaning, they want to know what that meaning is. When our ancestors were persecuted, they became all the more loyal to their Judaism; when present-day Jews are persecuted, they begin to wish that they had never been born Jews.

If the Jewish people is to continue to live as a minority people among the other nations of the world, the Jews must understand clearly what their situation really is, and what sacrifices must be made in order to survive. Jews must come to an understanding with themselves as to the meaning which their survival has. Has it a meaning? We think so. Let us see what it is.

We can get some idea of the meaning which Jewish survival can have from the description in the Book of Esther of how Haman felt when Mordecai refused to bow down to him. Haman became very angry at Mordecai, and decided to destroy all the Jews. This is exactly what happens whenever a minority refuses to be treated by the majority as though they (the minority) were slaves. When a minority insists upon equal-

ity and respect, the majority's pride is hurt. Soon the majority begins to fear the minority; then they begin to persecute.

In almost every other case, whenever a nation was conquered by another, it would be absorbed by the conqueror, and disappear. Not so in the case of the Jews; even though other nations conquered them, they still insisted upon remaining a nation; and, what was more, they predicted that the time would come when their God would rule over the whole world, and they themselves would be the most important nation in the world. Naturally, this made the conquering nations angry. Thus, the Persians, the Greeks, the Romans, and, during the Middle Ages, the Christian Church treated our ancestors poorly because they refused to be converted to the religion and the nationhood of the majority. Instead, they demanded equality and respect.

Today, we Jews should in our way do what our ancestors did in their way. Instead of saying, "Well, that is how we must be treated. Minorities have no right to live. They should become merged with the majority," we should insist on the *right to be different*. We should demand that even if one group differs from another in religion, or traditions, or national history, or race, there should not be any persecution or injustice done to the differing group. The Jews today should feel that it is their mission to teach the world how minorities ought to be treated; and when Jews are persecuted, they should not only think about their own condition but should realize that they are suffering for *all* mi-

norities. They should work together with all liberal and fair-minded people who believe in human rights, to see to it that the Jews and all minorities are treated with respect.

Until the time comes when we Jews are no longer hated and persecuted, we should understand that our suffering is part of the growing-up process of the world. We should measure the progress which mankind makes by the way we are treated. When conditions are bad for us, we should realize that justice and freedom have not yet been achieved; when we live in peace and security, we will know that some of our ideals have been realized. This is the meaning which our suffering as a people can have for us.

We must, therefore, continue to survive as a people, for if we disappear, we shall have surrendered to force and power. As long as we continue to live on, we shall be the living symbols of the power of the *spirit*, the power which no physical force can ever defeat. Thus our survival will be an influence for good.

The desire to survive, in spite of persecution, develops only from the faith in God which our religion gives us. So long as we understand the significance of the Sabbath and the Festivals, and get our inspiration from them; so long as our belief in God helps us to be at our best and to work for the highest human ideals; so long as our religion keeps before our eyes at all times a clear picture of the perfect world, and makes us want freedom, cooperation, and righteous law; so long as our belief in God, in the Force that is within us, helps

us to remake ourselves and the world—we will want to live on as a people. Then, in spite of whatever the wicked of the world may do, we shall be able to say, as the writer of a Psalm said twenty-five hundred years ago: “No weapon that is forged against you will succeed; and every tongue that will rise against you in judgment you will answer.”

SOME THOUGHTS ON CHAPTER IX

1. “I am a Jew and I am proud of it.” Have you ever said that? Have you heard others say it? What are you (or they) proud of? What would you say has been the Jews’ most important contribution to the world?
2. Nationalism means loyalty to one’s nation. “Universalism” means loyalty to all mankind. Can one be loyal to both? Is there a conflict always? Never? Sometimes?
3. Jews were tempted, in every age, to imitate the people around them. Jews in America, too, imitate the ways of their neighbors. Which American traits can you mention which, you believe, Jews *ought* to adopt? Which do you think ought to be left alone?
4. Is it possible to have fine manners and a mean character? How should people be judged? Do you think fine manners are unimportant? Does Judaism have anything to say about etiquette? Look up *derekh eretz* in the encyclopedia and discuss.

act, with their attitudes, their ideas of what is good and what is bad, with their ideals. Belief in God has to do with our attitude toward life itself. Do we find life good? Is life worthwhile? If we believe that life is worthwhile, that it is good, that, in spite of sickness and accidents, in spite of poverty and war, in spite of all the sad and difficult conditions in the world, the world is a wonderful place to live in and *can be made a still better place*, then we believe in God. When we believe in God, we cannot be discouraged because we believe that all the misery in the world is due, not to the fact that misery must be there, that it is a necessary part of life, but to the fact that we have not yet discovered how to do away with that misery.

One of the reasons we get discouraged so often is that we tend to forget that there is God in the world. Most of us live very busy lives. We go about our business, and we are so taken up with our duties that we have little time to think about the goodness, or the beauty of the world. It is very difficult to be always aware of God. The result is that we get the impression that the evils of the world are bound to remain with us for all time. For that reason, it is necessary for us to set aside definite days or parts of certain days just for the purpose of fixing our thoughts upon seeking God. That is the purpose of the Sabbath and Festivals which we have studied.

What do we mean by seeking God? We mean, first of all, opening our eyes to the goodness that already exists in the world, recognizing it, becoming aware of

it. We all know people who are always looking at the black side of everything. They fail to recognize goodness even when it is there. It is, of course, not easy to see the encouraging side all the time. This requires training and practice. Seeking God means being on the lookout for the goodness in life. It means, secondly, concentrating upon good ideals in order to bring out the goodness in ourselves. There is a great amount of goodness in ourselves which we never make use of. It is stored away somewhere inside us. The problem is: how can we get to it so that it begins to influence our thoughts and actions?

The answer is: we can do this by prayer. Now, we must remember that prayer, like belief in God, has undergone serious changes since long ago. For example, when belief in God had to do with changing nature (such as bringing rain or raising crops), prayer dealt with rain and crops. Today we can no longer pray for rain, but we should pray for the wisdom to use that rain properly, the courage to face the difficult times when rain is scarce, the knowledge necessary to give us a substitute for rain if rain does not come. Will such prayers come true? Such prayers have a very good chance of coming true because the very praying has a strange effect upon us: it gives us the determination to go ahead and accomplish those things for which we pray. Our natures are such that we can generate our own power, that is, we can, by sincere prayer for courage, gain courage; we can, by sincere prayer for understanding, be inspired to seek understanding. When we

explore our hearts, looking for goodness, praying and hoping that that goodness will come, we *bring it out*. This is what we mean by prayers coming true: the *godliness* in ourselves answers the prayer.

Prayer also fixes our attention upon the goodness, beauty or truth outside ourselves. When we sing hymns of praise, we do not do what the ancients did; they were flattering the gods to make them feel good. We sing praises in order to bring to our attention all that is beautiful and fine in the world, to make ourselves realize that God is in the world, and that sometime in the future the *whole* world will be filled with beauty and goodness.

The question arises: how can we translate these ideas about belief in God, seeking after God, and prayer, into actual activity as Jews? If Jewish religion is to be for us a living force in our lives, we must show how it can help us to discover the worthwhileness of life, the goodness in the world; it must inspire us to act in such a way that we shall add to the goodness and beauty of life. At the present time, we Jews live in two separate worlds which seem to have no connection with each other. For the greater part of the week, we live in the busy world of everyday activities, never giving a thought to these ideas; on Sabbaths and Festivals we live in a world of memories, memories of the ancient glories of the Jewish people, or vague hopes in some distant future, which have very little to do with the lives we lead. Our task is to make Jewish religion work, to make it change our

usual attitudes, to have it make a difference in the way we live.

In order to do this, we have re-examined the special occasions which our people have created for the purpose of seeking God, namely, the Sabbath and the Festivals. We have tried to understand what there is about these days and their celebrations which would enable us to make the best use of them for the purpose of creating in us the sense of the worthwhileness of life. We have tried to find out what ideals and what hopes our ancestors had in mind in connection with these days. We have then translated those ideals and hopes into modern ideals and hopes. In this way, we have built a bridge between the past and the present, which should make our history meaningful to us.

If the meaning of these holidays is now clear in our minds, however, we should not feel satisfied until we have done two things: (1) find out how we may best express these ideas in prayer; and (2) find out how we may best apply these ideas in our relations with our parents, friends, teachers, fellow citizens.

Bear in mind that the purpose of prayer is to keep us always aware of our ideals, and to give us the enthusiasm to work for our ideals. Our job, then, is to interest ourselves in the synagogue service. Learn thoroughly the prayers that have come down to us from the past. Study them. Ask: "Do these prayers express the ideas which I believe?" If they do, learn to say them sincerely and with enthusiasm. If they do not, try to compose new prayers. In every synagogue, to-